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**Configurations of Mothering
in
Post-war British Women's Playwriting**

by

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy in
English and Comparative Literary Studies**

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Declaration

I hereby confirm that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Neither this thesis as a whole nor any of its component sections have been published or currently considered for publication. I presented an earlier version of the section on Timberlake Wertenbaker in Chapter 5 at ‘The Politics of Women’s Writing’ Conference, organised by the Northern Seminar for Twentieth Century Literature (Liverpool, 7 November 1998) and at a Graduate Conference organised by the Department of English, University of Warwick (9 February 1999). I am aiming to present a paper based on Chapter 2 at the ‘After the Deluge: Women’s Writing, 1945-1960’ Conference (De Montfort University, Leicester, 7 July 2001).

Abstract

While examining a selection of plays centred on the phenomenon of mothering, my thesis also investigates the interaction between theatre and feminism in post-war Britain, aiming to highlight mutual correspondences between women's theatre making and feminist agendas. I focus mainly on the period of second-wave feminism, but I also discuss the decade preceding the appearance of the Women's Liberation Movement, as well as its aftermath up to the mid-nineties. Scrutinising proto-feminist, feminist and post-feminist stances, I argue that several fifties women dramatists anticipated key concerns of the late sixties and seventies; and equally, that many playwrights active after the heyday of second-wave feminism revisited the climate of the seventies in an attempt to evaluate the transformations that have since occurred in women's lives. In this manner, I not only contextualise some of the major achievements and shortcomings of successive feminist interventions, but also elaborate on key changes that have taken place in the negotiation of dramatic form and content.

Rather than privileging one dominant theoretical position and adopting its perspective for the purposes of my analysis, I connect the work of playwrights informed by different artistic positions and political convictions, in order to pinpoint the principle of co-existence and multiplicity. This aesthetic and ideological diversity in women's writing for the stage, characteristic of the past five decades, has been confirmed not only by the primary and secondary sources that I drew upon but also by the playwrights themselves, whom I interviewed. For most present-day female dramatists, as this thesis argues, contemporary British women's theatre is a space of experimentation and of confluence - in which the broad range of individual voices can situate themselves next to one another, without the urge to replicate an ultimate direction imposed by hegemonic political constraints or artistic platforms.

Introduction

This dissertation has its roots in my personal preoccupation with the phenomenon of mothering, a phenomenon that I interpret - alongside numerous theorists and fellow women - as a central facet of female identity. I posit the concept of mothering as a universal intellectual and artistic potential, metaphoric for all female creativity and vitality. In order to denote the physical and emotional experience of giving birth and nurturing - irreversibly connected to historical, social and medical contexts - I utilise the term 'motherhood'. Though potentially ubiquitous too, the exercise of motherhood as a function has operated in the second half of the twentieth century as a result of multiple negotiations, with factors as diverse as societal pressures, women's altering lifestyle choices, as well as individual biological limitations. I also extend my investigation to the issue of parenting - involving both sexes in the desire for reproduction and nurturing - whilst I open up avenues for sublimation and translatability. Through the medium of theatre I examine the transposition of fact to fiction; and scrutinise the role of metaphor, allegory and symbolism in the construction of a journey from immediate practice or longing to play and performance text. Overall, I argue for multiplicity and diversity in all disciplines and debates that I follow: from parental interventions through feminist standpoints to British women's theatre.

Analysing a selection of plays centred on the various components of the mothering/motherhood/parenting fusion, this dissertation also concerns itself with the relationship between theatre and feminism in post-war Britain. I seek to investigate

aspects of women's contribution to the art of theatre making, alongside the ways in which feminist ideas have been formulated and/or appropriated outside academia. These two major threads of scrutiny (concerning genre and theoretical approach) will be positioned into a span of time that constituted a period of unprecedented flourishing for women's voices in the public sphere. I broadly identify this period with the phase of second-wave feminism, however, I examine both the years leading up to the appearance of the Women's Liberation Movement and the period following its zenith, up almost to the present. In this way, my thesis tries to offer a brief insight into the climate of four decades - from the mid-fifties to the mid-nineties - and I shall be investigating, respectively, pre-feminist, feminist and post-feminist positions.

I shall argue that the fifties playwrights anticipated and addressed - even if obliquely at times - most of the topical concerns of the late sixties and seventies. Similarly, many playwrights writing after the heyday of second-wave feminism continued to revisit the seventies and juxtaposed it against a later moment, that of their plays' present. Thus, the playwrights created opportunities for confronting both the achievements and shortcomings of feminist interventions, often speculating on the necessity and potential circumstances of a next phase in women's orchestrated self-assertion.

Rather than privileging one single feminist stance and presenting facts through this perspective, I shall link together dramatists writing from a variety of ideological positions, emphasising the importance of co-existence and multiplicity within feminism. Although references to such positions will constitute a standard presence throughout the thesis, I have devoted an introductory chapter to mapping out some of the major directions in feminist thinking since the mid-fifties. This section is intended to help contextualise both women's stage work and feminist

theory in relation to the defining historical, political and cultural phenomena at a given moment.

Bringing together the categories ‘women’, ‘playwriting’ and ‘feminism’ has directly led me to address the debate concerning the terminology utilised for women-authored theatre practice. The predominant methodology of the thesis is dramatic criticism, as I engage with women’s playwriting primarily as text rather than theatre production and performance. I do acknowledge the impact of women’s theatre making as a collaborative effort that culminates in stage performance, yet I am equally interested in exploring the potential of women-authored plays as another facet of women’s writing, thus emphasising the literary connections of female creativity. As for the label ‘feminist’, I eventually decided to exclude it from my title, despite constantly asserting my work’s indebtedness to feminism. Several of the most prominent critics in the field (such as Lizbeth Goodman, Elaine Aston, Helene Keyssar) have utilised the term ‘feminist theatre’ extensively,¹ whereas another group (amongst them Susan Bassnett) have queried the appropriateness of the qualifier ‘feminist’ and called for the ideologically more neutral ‘women’s theatre’.²

Commencing with the early nineties, rather than addressing the shared experience of women, writers on the topic have started to explore the differentiation between various feminist positions. In this context, Goodman contrasted ‘women’s theatre’ with ‘feminist theatre’; positing the latter as ‘political theatre oriented towards change’, that

should be defined flexibly in order to take account of differences between women, and also to allow for differences in the same woman’s (women’s) perspectives over time, and in different social contexts.³

Goodman formulated this position in the wake of contestations regarding some of the earlier definitions,⁴ as well as following Jill Dolan’s claim regarding the lack of

ideological unity within feminism and the location of different types of feminist ideas behind the various feminist theatrical forms.⁵ In fact, Goodman's *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* started and ended with a statement celebrating flexibility and ambivalence, claiming that it was the very 'multiplicity of perspectives presented' that generated the 'ambiguous identities' of feminist theatres.⁶

Although I agree with this view and argue myself for the multiple perspectives inherent in feminism and women's playwriting, I found it crucial to consult the playwrights themselves - some of whom I interviewed myself - when instituting a terminology to define their work. Aware in most cases of the theoretical discussions, they have voiced their concern regarding the term 'feminist'. In fact, while all the authors discussed have claimed a certain feminist identification on a personal level, none of them declared herself a 'feminist playwright'. In general, they emphasised the constraining nature of such a category - for some, this also included the 'woman playwright' label - which they saw as producing yet another intellectual ghetto.

Nevertheless, most playwrights acknowledged that the work produced by women - as dramatists, directors or companies - needed as much attention and support as ever. In fact, women playwrights began signalling a backlash in terms of directorial interest (including female directors) from the early nineties onwards. Following a certain heyday at the Royal Court - when, in Timberlake Wertenbaker's words, 'women writers were prominent' - the nineties brought about a return to the theatrical celebration of the male central figure.⁷ The number of companies producing plays by women has continued to be low, despite the fact that more women are currently writing for the stage than ever before and that the 'revolution'

induced by women playwrights (in terms of experimentation with form and fresh topics) is being extensively discussed.

Since women are still under-represented in theatre management, only a small proportion of female-authored plays are performed; work by women being considered to be more risky.⁸ The most frequently staged English-language woman playwright of all time is still Agatha Christie, although plays by Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems, Timberlake Wertenbaker and Charlotte Keatley have enjoyed notable success and have been integrated into school and academic syllabi, thus gaining a sort of canonical status. Despite these achievements, Duncan Wu's 2000 and 1996 volumes on contemporary British dramatists and directors included no women, while in 1999 Keith D. Peacock summed up women's theatre in a twenty-five-page chapter within a study ten times that long. Peacock indicated the work of Churchill, Wertenbaker, Louise Page and Sarah Daniels, whereas in 1993 Michael Billington reduced contemporary women's theatre to two plays by Churchill and Christopher Innes's 1992 critical survey only discussed Gems and Churchill.⁹ A related cause of women playwrights' limited visibility has been identified in the fact that most really influential theatre critics are men (middle-aged, white and university educated) who tend to exercise a fairly negative sense of judgement with regard to experimental work. Writers as diverse in approach and style as Charlotte Keatley, Winsome Pinnock or Timberlake Wertenbaker have commented not only on the likelihood of critics coming to performances with preconceived ideas, but also on the inadequacy of the methods employed in theatre criticism.

Beyond critical response, as some of the playwrights have pointed out in interviews conducted for this study, becoming accepted more widely is a matter of time and of more and more women writers coming forward. Despite the current

backlash, women have not given up writing and working for the theatre. Even if they have continued to be under-represented, an increasing number of women practitioners have started to occupy influential positions in recent years, such as directors,¹⁰ agents¹¹ and artistic directors.¹² Just like the playwrights, however, they do not necessarily wish to be labelled as a 'woman director' or a 'feminist practitioner' first and foremost and, hence, risk finding themselves exposed to the effects of ghettoisation in theatre.

For my analysis I have chosen plays written by women playwrights working in the United Kingdom. My intention is to offer a selection of works that in my opinion constitute an alternative history of the past four decades in the UK. Beyond my own commentaries I extensively draw on historical and political data in order to place all the plays in their respective contexts of origin, following Terry Eagleton's definition on critical activity:

Criticism was only ever significant when it engaged with more than literary issues - when, for whatever historical reason, the "literary" was suddenly foregrounded as the medium of vital concerns deeply rooted in the general intellectual, cultural, and political life of the epoch.¹³

I shall be highlighting, in other words, cases of interdependence between 'fact' and 'fiction', instances of history, politics, medical discourse and their immediate reflections in theatre. Since I have been concerned with the study of individual plays in the context of British culture, I have excluded thematically relevant material by American or Australian authors. I have included, however, references to secondary texts from outside Britain whenever their influence on the British readership has reached notable proportions, as in the case of American liberal feminism, object-relationist theory or French feminist thinking.

My investigations are focused through a preoccupation shared by women as political activists, theorists and writers alike: mothering. This theme unites a rich

array of works, written by both established and lesser-known authors in a variety of stylistic registers, out of which I have selected representative samples. In fact, four chapters of this thesis have been structured according to frequently encountered aspects and approaches to mothering, as well as parenting and parenthood, as attributes and functions potentially accessible to both sexes. Thus, the plays discussed address motherhood as a biologically unavoidable yet nevertheless empowering experience (Chapter 2); the tensions between mothering and career (Chapter 3); the function of surrogate parenting - as a phenomenon involving any sort of substitution of the biological parent, from temporary care to medically assisted reproduction (Chapter 4); and the impossibility or denial of parenting - for reasons including personal choice and medical condition (Chapter 5).

Apart from thematic unity, the chapters are also organised in a manner to survey work produced throughout the successive decades (for instance, the fifties or the nineties) or periods of comparable length (1972 to 1982, 1978 to 1987). Thus, the thesis follows a trajectory from the proto-feminism and aesthetic diversity of the fifties (via the work of Enid Bagnold, Shelagh Delaney and Ann Jellicoe) to the co-existence of bourgeois-liberal, radical and socialist feminist tendencies in the seventies and early eighties, contemporaneous with Thatcher's election and first years in office (as reflected by Pam Gems and Caryl Churchill).¹⁴ The climate of the late seventies and eighties is scrutinised through the juxtaposition of plays by Michelene Wandor and Charlotte Keatley, both affiliated to socialist feminism yet to different aesthetic principles. Finally, the end of the eighties and the nineties are connected to the emergence of post-feminism and of ideological fragmentation, and will be discussed via references to the work of Trish Cooke, Claire Luckham and Timberlake Wertenbaker.

Why these particular plays, though? While most theatre historians agree upon signalling the start of a new era in British drama with the premiere of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956, the choice of such a landmark occasion is rather arbitrary. As opposed to a single act that reshaped British drama, I shall suggest that, in fact, a less spectacular and more gradual revolution took place. This process spanned a number of years and was visible in the work of several women playwrights, including Enid Bagnold's 1956 *The Chalk Garden* and the 1958 debut productions of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* and Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother*. Although Bagnold made no attempt at formal dramatic innovation, she entirely re-configured the subject matter of her seemingly conventional drawing room comedies. I posit *The Chalk Garden* as a case study of proto-feminism and *avant la lettre* preoccupation with sexual politics, despite its dated style. Lacking the theoretical support and the social and political climate in which gender and sexuality could have been openly discussed, the plays of Bagnold and Delaney could not fully explore certain ideas that they implicitly tackled. Nevertheless, they constitute works of reference in women's consciousness-raising that initiated the subsequent waves of openly interrogative works. Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother* is an excellent example of experimental theatre that can be read as a British alternative to what was later launched in France as *écriture féminine*. Although Jellicoe could not have been aware of the concept theorised by Hélène Cixous,¹⁵ her theatrical discourse anticipated a new kind of language modelled on corporeality, locating the female body as the site of this new means of communication and giving voice to repressed desires and experiences.

Just as Jellicoe's play became marginalised for its anarchic structure, Charlotte Keatley's 1987 *My Mother Said I Never Should* was initially labelled

inadequate for the stage. Keatley was told by literary managers that what she had written was not really a play, owing to its unconventional (non-linear) treatment of time. In fact, Keatley's major concern was the exploration of time, via the constant journeys between past and present, as well as the erasure of family bonds and hierarchies between the characters. These are not merely elements of formal innovation but details of crucial importance towards the understanding of the play and - as it ultimately turned out - have generated an exceptionally warm reception with audiences.

With regard to the treatment of time, however, the subsequent impact on forthcoming playwrights of Churchill's 1982 *Top Girls* is perhaps second to none. Although the play's subject matter - female professional success - had already stirred considerable attention, it was the juxtaposition of arbitrary moments in history that captivated critics and audiences. Churchill not only succeeded in merging past and present, but she also devised an extremely influential technique of overlapping dialogue, creating an impression of overemphasised simultaneity and non-communication. Though very different in style and ambition, both *Top Girls* and *My Mother Said I Never Should* bear connections to Julia Kristeva's theory on 'women's time'.¹⁶ The lack of chronological unity and the encounter of characters from different historical moments link the two plays with regard to the subversion of linear - and hence, 'patriarchal' - time and advocate a sense of rhythmic, female-identified cyclicity, characteristic, according to Kristeva, to the second phase of (radical) feminism.

Although I discuss the plays in chronological order - to stress the interdependence between social, political context and theatrical discourse - I read them as interdependent and intertextual with each other, offering new readings and

fresh perspectives on one another. For example, I shall highlight the ways in which Michelene Wandor reworked the genre of the English drawing room comedy in *AID Thy Neighbour* (1978) and reconsidered the tradition of Enid Bagnold. Trish Cooke's heroine in *Back Street Mammy* (1989) reconnects to Delaney's Jo in *A Taste of Honey* both as a female adolescent and as a daughter re-enacting her mother, particularly in terms of teenage pregnancy. However, while the fifties context did not offer Jo much of a choice with regard to unwanted motherhood, Dynette can delay giving birth until later in life, when she is psychologically and financially equipped for it. The two plays also share the protagonists' initial location in Northern working-class environments, but, while Cooke placed Dynette in a traditional family of Caribbean descent, Delaney engineered one of the earliest instances of subversion in fifties theatre by disrupting the conventional family structure. Delaney presented Jo - and her mother, Helen - in an alternative arrangement to the orthodox family, incorporating Helen's successive partners and, most importantly, Jo's friend and carer, the closet homosexual Geof.

In fact, none of the main characters in Delaney's, Bagnold's or Jellicoe's plays are located in stable marital relationships, despite the official fifties propaganda on the role of marriage as a cornerstone of society. Their plays refute the idea of the conventional family, thus forecasting the large-scale move towards alternative family structures in the seventies and eighties (dramatised, among the plays discussed here, in *AID Thy Neighbour* and *My Mother Said I Never Should*). Writing well before the ideological impact of feminist theory and the mass support of the Women's Liberation Movement, all three playwrights displayed a profound preoccupation with women's role outside the sphere of the family and with women as independent social and sexual beings.

Delaney and Cooke focus on adolescents, but the majority of playwrights scrutinised here situate thirty-something professional women at the centre of their plays. These figures constitute some of the strongest characters in contemporary British women's theatre and enact the full range of attitudes towards mothering, from utter rejection, via quasi-indifference to pure longing. But while the plays of the seventies and eighties centre on successful career women who lead their lives predominantly in the public sphere, the plays of the nineties capture their protagonists in a domestic environment. For many women of the seventies and eighties career was a major concern, in agreement with bourgeois feminist ideology. Although predating Margaret Thatcher's rise to power, Pam Gems's 1977 *Queen Christina* forecast, explored, and ultimately questioned the viability of male norms of practice when applied to career-aspiring women. Born a woman yet educated as a man, Gems's protagonist attempts to live on male terms, somewhat like Churchill's Marlene and Marion in, respectively, *Top Girls* and *Owners* (1972). Despite their divergent trajectories, all three characters accept a symbolic pact with destiny according to which success becomes available to them at the expense of repressing or bartering their maternal drive. Beneath the surface of success, however, Gems portrays a regretful Christina, unable to re-live her life as a woman, while Churchill explores the option of intra-gender oppression as a route towards substitute mothering.

Women of the nineties, on the other hand, are often presented as looking back on a former career. In the instances I discuss, the protagonists are solely preoccupied with their desire for a child, which they have kept postponing in order to achieve professional success first. Though cautious with regard to labelling this approach post-feminist, playwrights such as Claire Luckham and Timberlake Wertenbaker

make a case for the importance of combining career and family towards obtaining complete personal fulfilment. The protagonists of *The Choice* (1992) and *The Break of Day* (1995) clearly state that they do not intend to institute maternity as their unique aim in life, yet they also stress that a career could not justify missing out on the experience of parenting either.

Finally, I wish to address the issue of the authorial voice used in this dissertation. Since it is a work located at the intersection of several disciplines, it was intended to combine a range of different approaches and methodologies. As a work permeated by feminist allegiances, it required to be written in the first person, while as a piece of predominantly text-based criticism submitted to a department of English, it called perhaps for the more neutral and authoritative third-person approach. Eventually, I decided to use the third person, apart from the introduction and conclusions. These are the sections in which I define my position, while the thesis itself brings together different (at times contradictory) stances, without any of them being privileged above the others. My overarching argument is to advocate the multiplicity and polymorphous nature of women's playwriting - by using the support of critics situated at opposite poles of the critical, theoretical and ideological spectrum - hence, I considered it suitable to conduct the discussion in the third person.

This decision was also inspired by my personal location as an external commentator of the post-war British cultural climate. I only moved to Britain in 1996 and till then was based predominantly in Romania, in regions inhabited by the Hungarian minority to which I belong. Growing up in the seventies and eighties, my immediate experience of feminism and women's role in society has been considerably different from that of British women of my generation. Neither the late

sixties wave of anti-establishment protests, nor the subsequent Women's Liberation Movement reached Romania or indeed Eastern Europe to any significant extent. My mother was not a second-wave feminist either, although she was a woman with an independent career and income who, like almost all women in socialist countries, worked full-time till retirement age. In my childhood there was no part-time work available for mothers with infants, though there were ample childcare facilities at a subsidised cost. Despite working full-time, however, most women would still be solely responsible for the management of household duties and for shopping for their families (consisting generally of two parents and up to three children). This double burden gradually increased into an almost insurmountable challenge towards the mid-eighties, when owing to massive shortages in consumer goods the mere weekly provision became a full-time task.

Born in 1969, I belong to a generation emerging immediately in the aftermath of President Ceausescu's infamous decree that banned abortions altogether. We represented the largest community so far encountered by the education system, which was just as unprepared to deal with our sheer numbers as the world of employment subsequently required to accommodate us. However, there was no officially acknowledged unemployment in Romania till December 1989 - the moment of the 'Revolution' and the overturn of dictatorship. Almost overnight though, previously concealed statistics surfaced, confirming long-existent problems and leading to massive rates of dismissal. Women and young people featured particularly high in this ratio, often owing to their inadequate qualifications for the jobs they held. 1990 also brought about the first opportunity for anyone to choose not to work, although unemployment became less of a preference than a consequence of the economic transition.

The country formally subscribing to the rules of free market economy, the advantages of socialist welfare disappeared almost instantly. Childcare became a major problem and women with secure jobs would think twice before considering a family. Following the legalisation of terminations in late 1989 the birth rate plummeted exponentially and Romania became a European leader in the number of abortions per capita, medically assisted terminations constituting a major form of family planning. The number of marriages and two-parent families also decreased considerably; more and more couples choosing to cohabit or to delay starting a family. Whilst divorce and single parenting is on the increase, alternative family structures involving same-sex partnerships are still rare, owing to the current criminalisation of homosexuality. Despite immense political pressures exercised by the European Community, the Romanian Parliament repeatedly voted against its decriminalisation, arguing for the incompatibility between Orthodox morality and same-sex desire.

Whilst the political and economic transformations throughout Eastern Europe have irreversibly affected women's lives, interest in feminism and the Western tradition of Women's Liberation has been more of a theoretical and academic, rather than a practical and grassroots phenomenon in the entire region. Unlike the Czech Republic or Poland, one can hardly signal the existence of token women's groups in Romania (also because social organisation in general is less institutionalised). There are, however, academics, journalists and writers (mainly poets and novelists rather than dramatists) researching and celebrating women's contributions to all disciplines, offering a climate for a public discussion of women's achievements. As a member of this community, temporarily abroad, I endeavour to act as non-partisan observer in Britain, though I am aware that my biases - as an East-European, white, heterosexual

female, with a background in literary rather than performance studies - potentially lead to a subjective voice.

¹ Cf. Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993b); Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, eds., *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre* (Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996); Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995) and *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1999b); Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984) and *Feminist Theatre and Theory* (Basingstoke, Macmillan: 1996).

²² Susan Bassnett-McGuire, 'Towards a Theory of Women's Theatre', in *Semiotics of Drama and Theatre: New Perspectives in the Theory of Drama*, "Linguistic and Literary Studies in Eastern Europe" Series, vol. 10., ed. by Herta Schmid and Aloysius van Kesteren (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984). Since most critics have (re)-interpreted the conditions under which a text, a play or a performance can be labelled feminist, a broad range of definitions have been formulated. For instance, in Janet Brown's view, 'When a woman's struggle for autonomy is a play's central rhetorical motive, that play can be considered a feminist drama'. Cf. Janet Brown, *Feminist Drama: Definition and Critical Analysis* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1985), p. 1. In contrast to this categorisation based on content, Helene Keyssar argued for the importance of what she called 'role transformations' that 'emphasize[d] the commonality of the stories told and [...] refuse[d] the old hierarchies of theatre'. Cf. Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women* (New York: Grove, 1985), p. 90. Reworking her own earlier definition, Janet Brown concluded in 1991 that 'Feminist drama [...] [was] first of all one that [gave] voice to forgotten women'. Cf. Janet Brown, *Taking Center Stage: Feminism in Contemporary U.S. Drama* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991), p. 2. The playwright and critic Michelene Wandor - one of the opponents of the 'feminist theatre' label - warned as early as 1981 that, despite being written and performed by women and focusing on women's experiences, a play could still fail to challenge gender bias or biological determinism. Cf. Michelene Wandor, *Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 131.

³ Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993b), pp. 1 and 113.

⁴ Cf. Loren Kruger questioning the terminology used by Helene Keyssar in *Feminist Theatre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984); in Loren Kruger, 'The Dis-play's the Thing: Gender and the Public Sphere in Contemporary British Theatre', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 42. no. 1. (March 1990), p. 27.

⁵ Jill Dolan, 'Feminists, Lesbians and Other Women in the Theatre: Thoughts on the Politics of Performance', in *Themes in Drama: Women in Theatre*, vol. II., ed. by J. Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 20.

⁶ Goodman, 1993b, pp. 8 and 243.

⁷ Cf. the staging of plays such as Jez Butterworth's *Mojo*, Tracy Letts's *Killer Joe*, David Greer's *Burning Blue*, Simon Block's *Not A Game for Boys*, Paul Hudson's version of Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* or Louis Mellis's and David Scinto's *Gangster No. 1*.

⁸ According to a survey conducted in 1994, on average twenty percent of productions are authored by women. In heavily subsidised companies, or where the artistic director is male, this number drops to about fourteen percent. (Survey by Jenny Long, 'What Share of the Cake Now?', quoted in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), pp. ix-x.

⁹ Duncan Wu, *Making Plays: Interviews with Contemporary British Dramatists and Directors* (London: Routledge, 2000) and *Six Contemporary Dramatists: Bennett, Potter, Gray, Brenton, Hare, Ayckbourn* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); Keith D. Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the 1980s* (Greenwood Press, 1999); Michael Billington, *One-Night Stands: A Critic's View of British Theatre from 1971 to 1991* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993); Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama, 1890-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). As notable exceptions, David Edgar's *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Faber, 1999) included nine women amongst the twenty-nine contributors, while Dan Rebellato's *1956 and All That: The Making of Modern British Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1999) featured five female and six male playwrights.

Amongst earlier surveys, John Russell Taylor's volume, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama* (2nd ed., revised, London: Eyre Methuen, 1977) covered three women dramatists as opposed to nineteen male playwrights; John Elsom's *Post-war British Theatre Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) reprinted critical reactions to seventeen plays written between 1956-78, out of which two were associated with a female author or director; John Russell Brown focused on two women playwrights out of twenty-five in *A Short Guide to Modern British Drama* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1982), while Colin Chambers's and Mike Prior's *Playwrights' Progress: Patterns of Postwar British Drama* (Oxford: Amber Lane, 1987) listed two women playwrights alongside six men.

¹⁰ Cf. the work of Deborah Warner, Katie Mitchell, Di Trevis, Jules Wright, Yvonne Brewster, Paulette Randall, Phyllida Lloyd, Kate Crutchley, Annie Castledine, Brigid Larmour, Nancy Diuguid, Annabel Arden, Lynne Parker etc.

¹¹ E.g. Mel Kenyon (Casarotto Ramsay), Tessa Sayle Agency, Leah Schmidt Associates, Judy Daish Associates, Cecily Ware Literary Agents, Theresa Howard Associates, Michelene Steinberg Playwrights' Agency, Valerie Hoskins (Jeremy Conway Associates) etc.

¹² Cf. Jude Kelly (West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds), Anna Furse and Vicky Featherstone (Paines Plough), Lisa Goldman (The Red Room, London fringe), Jules Wright (Women's Playhouse Trust), Jenny Killick (Traverse, Edinburgh), Garry Hynes (Abbey Theatre, Dublin), Nancy Meckler (Shared Experience Theatre, London fringe).

¹³ Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: New Left Books, 1984), p. 107.

¹⁴ I utilise the term **proto-feminism** as a generic label referring to work produced before the emergence of second-wave feminism, and address the various feminist stances as follows: **bourgeois-liberal**: as a quest for gender-justice that requires a re-examination of the rules that govern the public world, so that it does not block women's access; **radical**: as an argument against the patriarchal system as such, that oppresses women and which cannot be reformed - as liberal feminism claims - only disregarded altogether, **marxist/socialist**: as a challenge to class society, the supremacy of private property and Capitalism itself; **post-feminist**: as the latest term collating different forms of feminist inquiry, written in the course of the nineties, by a generation reaching adulthood after the heyday of the Women's Liberation Movement.

¹⁵ Cf. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981).

¹⁶ Cf. Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

Chapter 1

The Politics of Parenting in a Post-war British Context:

Experience, Theory, Theatre

Mothers don't write, they are written.
(Helene Deutsch)

I joined my four characters as mother and daughter to put this powerful and dramatic bond of love and jealousy at the centre of the play.
(Charlotte Keatley)¹

Mother representations in any one period are also contradictory, multiple and many-sided; a variety of images exists at the same time, and depending on how researchers look (with what questions in mind) they may find something very different.
(E.A.Kaplan)²

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to offer a selective overview of the diversity of theatrical and theoretical discourses on the issue of parenting in general, and mothering in particular that were circulating in post-war Britain. The sources I am drawing upon derive from and refer to the period between the fifties and the late nineties, and have been arranged chronologically in order to highlight the idea of constant change. I connect the transformations in terms of dramatic form and content to the broader context of mutations that occurred on the social, historical, political and medical scene from the mid-fifties onwards. In contrast to an earlier pattern of extended families, by the 1950s British families in general became 'nuclear'. From the seventies onwards there has been a gradual replacement of this model with alternative family structures. All these forms of family organisation are examined as metaphoric sites for society, while mothering and parenting (including surrogacy,

adoption, lesbian and gay parenting, the impact of reproductive technologies) are scrutinised as instances that indicate with considerable accuracy the standards of negotiation concerning sexual politics at a given time.

While I posit mothering/parenting and the family as loci of ideological and gender conflict, as represented in post-war British women's theatre, I am particularly interested in the interactions between playwrights and the feminist agenda. I draw upon the dialogue between developments in the women's movement and the constant reinvention of dramatic presentation and thematic preoccupations, according to the playwrights' politics of location. Thus, I shall contrast the proto-feminist views of Enid Bagnold, Shelagh Delaney and Ann Jellicoe with the various degrees of socialist and materialist engagement manifested by Michelene Wandor, Caryl Churchill and Charlotte Keatley. On a different note, I set Pam Gems's markedly stressed non-commitment to ideology against the tangentially post-feminist stance of Timberlake Wertenbaker, Trish Cooke or Claire Luckham. The theoretical stances that I map out cover a wide scale of locations, from socialist to psychoanalytical and radical to liberal, and are the work of British, American and French thinkers. Intersecting discourses on mothering and parenting in a variety of registers and disciplines, I hope to establish, therefore, parallels between factual details, theoretical positions and dramatic case studies, aiming to stress the diversity and vitality of the debate.

1.2 From Austerity to Affluence: The Emergence of Proto-feminism

The Characteristic feminine dilemma of today is usually summarised under the heading 'Career and Family'. The struggle for the right to work is no longer directed against external obstacles; no longer is there the same hostile public opinion to overcome. [...] Today the conflict has become 'internalised' and continues as a psychological problem which may assume many different variations and shades; and just because there is no longer an absolute 'either-or' to be decided on at the beginning of adult life, the pull in two directions goes on practically throughout a woman's life.³

The end of the Second World War facilitated the massive re-entry of men into peacetime life and employment, whereas for women it generated a comparably large-scale trend to return to the home and take up their traditional roles as wives and mothers. This 'backlash against feminism'⁴ reached its peak in the early fifties, and was widely aired in the media, especially in women's magazines. Domestic activities were presented as highly attractive occupations, housework often being shown as a particular kind of job, just as important and legitimate as any form of paid employment. However, not all women opted for this recommended pattern to re-assume their household duties. A significant number of women (in their early twenties as well as in their thirties and forties, the latter married and having completed the process of child-rearing) decided to maintain their presence in the job market. Statistical data actually proved that - in spite of ideological opposition - women's presence in the labour force consolidated in the years following the war.

The issue of women's waged work provided the starting point for Alva Myrdal's and Viola Klein's 1956 study *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, which aimed - perhaps for the first time - at legitimating the compatibility between family responsibilities and paid employment for women. The book made it clear that women's work was needed by the labour market and its key dilemma was not whether a married woman should also work for wages, but instead whether a

working woman should marry. The authors stressed that, from a strictly economic perspective, children were a burden rather than an asset, especially for the poorer sections of the population. Being forced to work long hours due to financial necessity, especially in the early years of the decade, many working-class women had no other choice than to neglect their children. Childcare services were practically unavailable and, even if they were on offer, the women in question would not have been able to afford them.⁵

Another aspect of Myrdal's and Klein's discussion was connected to the changing patterns in family structures. Due to the fact that families had considerably reduced in size and, hence, women in the fifties tended to spend a shorter period of their lives in childbearing compared to their mothers, the authors explored the psychological frustration of women who had no preoccupation other than their families. Writing at a time of a renaissance in family values, in which the focus of research in psychology and psychoanalysis was primarily on the welfare of the child,⁶ Myrdal's and Klein's opening up of alternatives for women was both subversive and innovative. Constantly aware of the social obstacles facing women's involvement in paid work, Myrdal's and Klein's conclusion was nevertheless one of harmonising work with family:

We are convinced, however, that work and family are not in principle two irreconcilable alternatives.⁷

This call for harmony, however, was also the major weakness of their analysis, the one that has generated the largest amount of feminist criticism. The authors ended their book - as if offering a solution - with the very problem they might have started off with. They did not provide any practical methods in order for women to cope with the 'double burden' of employment and home, and failed even to attempt to involve anyone but the mother in the responsibility of caring for the family.

Nevertheless, several feminists in the forthcoming years addressed the possibility of combining homemaking with a career:

Women older than me chose *either* a career *or* marriage. You couldn't have both we were told. [...] [But] we said, I and my friends, we would be mothers and women in our own right.⁸

Women's growing interest in employment could be partly accounted for by the fact that they had enjoyed the (financial) freedom involved in paid work during and immediately after the war and they did not want to give it up for the social isolation of housework. Myrdal's and Klein's analysis distinguished two streams in women's entry into the labour market. On the one hand, there were women whose sole target was to supplement the family income and who tended to work in various manufacturing jobs; and on the other, women who had a specialised training or a higher education background who oriented themselves towards the vocational sectors.

Case Study no. 1

The category of vocational work constituted the most frequently represented type of female employment in the tradition of bourgeois theatre produced in the first half of the century,⁹ though by the fifties the genre had already entered its decline. Enid Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden* (1956), the only example of drawing-room comedy to be considered in this thesis, opens with the exploration of this very category before moving on to new thematic preoccupations. Despite observing the strict formal rules of the genre, Bagnold discusses a range of issues topical not only for her time but also for the forthcoming decades: such as surrogate parenting (by both female and

male characters), mother-daughter relationships, gender relations and the subversion of patriarchal rule. Her main focus is on the alternative family formed by Miss Madrigal (a woman with a complicated history passing as a governess), Laurel (her tutee), Mrs St Maugham (the lady of the house), as well as two male members of the household staff (the authoritarian Pinkbell - never present on stage - and Maitland, the butler, who shows signs of genuine capacity for caring). At the end of the play, Laurel withdraws from this arrangement in order to join her previously absent biological mother, but Madrigal and Mrs St Maugham take the decision to stay together and experiment with a new kind of social relationship. Madrigal embarks on teaching Mrs St Maugham gardening, that is caring, skills the latter has never had. Thus, Madrigal's vocation as a surrogate mother is sublimated into that of an educator, in the context of a successful negotiation of fresh terms between women across social barriers.

Compared to the economic austerity of the forties and early fifties, the final years of the fifties emerged as a period of unprecedented prosperity and stability. This prosperity, however, did not emanate in a vacuum, and certainly not without the reforms introduced by the Labour Government that came into power after the end of World War Two. The establishment of the National Health Service, the introduction of free secondary education, the building of new housing facilities - all within the creation of the Welfare State - contributed in a crucial manner to the setting up of a context in which gradual changes in the social structure could take place. Since Labour was defeated in the 1951 elections, however, the fifties have generally been associated with Conservative rule and a certain taken-for-granted sense of unity

generated at a political level through the three successive Conservative administrations between 1951-1964.

Despite a concerted effort to accomplish such a consensus, the fifties failed to conform to a homogeneous pattern. The end of Labour's first post-war government ironically coincided with the 1951 Festival of Britain, intended as a celebration of the party's achievements and of reconciliation. Two subsequent key moments also stood for contradictory tendencies. 1953, the year of the Coronation, symbolised consensus and stability; while 1956 introduced fracture and dissent, via events like the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Suez crisis, the production of *Look back in Anger*, the instant popularity of James Dean or the cinema showings of 'Rock around the Clock'.

Case Study No. 2

The fifties was also the decade that saw the infiltration of the so far largely taboo issue of sexuality into public discourse. 'Sexual potency in men and sexual responsiveness in women began to be seen as explicitly desirable qualities',¹⁰ while divorce or sexual reform became widely debated matters. Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* and Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, both written and produced in 1958, concentrate extensively on the discussion of such issues. Although only Delaney's work claims to be rooted in realism, both plays centre on strong and outspoken women characters who are constantly preoccupied with their sexuality. To some degree all these women characters (Helen and Jo in *A Taste of Honey*, and Greta in *The Sport of My Mad Mother*) represent the principle of the independent

woman, in spite of the fact that Helen makes attempts at marriage. Both Jo and Helen are aware that they are ultimately responsible for the management of their own lives, and they do not seek or desire male support in this sense. The character of Helen also constitutes one of the first female examples in British drama for the successful dissociation of love from sex. For her sex, is a source of income and pleasure, whereas marriage becomes a pathway towards social mobility.

The three characters are equally united via their respective experience of motherhood. In Delaney's play, motherhood is clearly shown as a non-desirable event, yet one that triggers the reconsideration of the problematic bond between Helen and Jo, who also happen to be mother and daughter. They represent two generations of women who have been forced to become mothers in spite of their desire for childlessness. Though successful in challenging the cultural aspect of mothering, neither Helen nor Jo succeeds in rejecting mothering as a biological experience. In contrast to Helen and Jo, Delaney places the character of Geoff, who is only too eager to support Jo and assume the role of the surrogate parent. He is a closet homosexual, a character whose lines were censored by Joan Littlewood for the original production. For him the alternative family arrangement with Jo and her forthcoming baby would provide a badly needed social cover and respect. Jellicoe, however, presents motherhood as an utterly desirable phenomenon for Greta. It has a symbolic quality and appears straightaway as a source of power. Owing to her mothering potential - she actually gives birth on stage - Greta has the capacity to dislocate the gender hierarchy that has hitherto been operating in the play and to institute a new regime of female control.¹¹

While Myrdal's and Klein's study was explicitly centred on a duality of roles presented as feasible options for British women, Betty Friedan's US-based analysis was aimed at pointing out the total lack of choice as far as the life-style of a woman was concerned. Published in 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* was 'the very problem that has no name'. Labelled 'the happy housewife heroine', the American married woman, gradually realising her dissatisfaction with her social position, found herself torn between the officially propagated image and her own inability to cope with the required masquerade. In Friedan's interpretation she had reached the stage of a profound identity crisis: aware of the 'sexual sell' that had taken place via her marriage yet unable to resist the 'functional freeze' in her day-to-day routine. As a result of her original 'mistaken choice' - marriage and motherhood - she had sentenced herself to a process of 'progressive dehumanization', to a relatively comfortable, yet equally inescapable 'concentration camp'. Evoking the image of the suburban housewife, the so-called dream of every young American woman, Friedan stressed the fact that becoming a wife and a mother lay at the foundation and constituted the only way of acceptance into society on terms comparable with male partners.

According to Friedan's thesis, the 'core of the problem for women' was not 'sexual but a problem of identity, a stunting or evasion of growth perpetuated by the feminine mystique':¹²

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity. [...] However, special and different, it is in no way inferior to the nature of man, it may even in certain respects be superior.¹³

In Friedan's view, woman's mistaken choice had been 'living by her sex alone, trading in her individuality for security',¹⁴ and she stated that a woman without an ambition to lead her into the future - beyond the biological function - was

‘committing a kind of suicide’.¹⁵ Transformed overnight into the voice of protest against centuries-long female submission, Friedan is remembered in the context of feminist intervention for calling attention to the importance of the issue of identity (as opposed to biology) for women.

While Friedan’s proto-feminist text conveyed an unwillingness to carry on with the current status quo, it was nevertheless a piece of conservative feminism, unconcerned with the possibilities of radical changes in society. Later stances - inspired by the emergence of the Women’s Liberation Movement and second-wave feminism - were characterised by a far more interventionist tone. The British context in which some of these radical points of view emerged coincided with the passing of a set of normative and legislative acts introduced by the Labour Government of Harold Wilson, regulating several aspects of family life and women’s health.¹⁶

Although this legislation paved the way for gradual transformations, it did not manage to achieve an overnight amelioration in the social condition of women and children or to enthuse the population at large. On the contrary, the immediate outcome of these attempts at reorganisation was a fairly massive shift of support from Labour to Conservative, recalling a similar situation that took place in 1951 when Labour’s efforts to establish the Welfare State ironically ushered in more than a decade of Conservative rule.

1.3 The Advent of Theory:

Second-wave Feminist Interpretations of Mothering as Problem and Privilege

The seventies catalysed the theorisation of motherhood and mothering, in radical and socialist feminist thinking alike. ‘Feminism and motherhood were [located,

however], in diametrical opposition [that] seemed almost axiomatic',¹⁷ feminist theorists unanimously channelling their work to 'liberate' women from what Adrienne Rich subsequently termed the institution and experience of mothering.¹⁸ Problematising both the ideology of mothering and the practice of motherhood, feminists in the early seventies not only displayed hostility towards of the figure of the mother, but also doubled the negative attitudes to motherhood with a negative perception of femininity. The theorists to whose work I am briefly turning now were aiming to offer some kind of instant remedy to women's lack of privilege in society. Even though some of these interventions might seem extravagant from the historical detachment of several decades, at the time of their first appearance they constituted important contributions to the debate on women's position in the social sphere. They succeeded in drawing attention to (then) topical issues and signalled potential causes behind women's unprivileged status. 1970 marked a watershed year in the history of the Women's Liberation Movement. Strictly speaking, it was the first full year in which the Movement operated; it saw the organisation of its first large-scale conference at Ruskin College in Oxford, and it was the year of publication of two landmark books on feminism. Both Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* were heavily informed by Marxist-socialist ideas, ideas that, in fact, were responsible for the shaping of feminist thought in Britain throughout the seventies and eighties. Whilst locating the cause for women's submission in society in their reproductive capacities, both books offer utopian solutions to this problem.

Firestone's radical 'case for a feminist revolution' posited the exploration of women's experience as central to any understanding of social division and conflict.

The crux of her argument was the importance of the connection between biological and social links:

To free women from their biology would be to threaten the social unit that is organised around biological reproduction and the subjection of women to their biological destiny, the family.¹⁹

Doing away with the biological family, therefore, was suggested as the best solution to women's oppression since it was women's mothering capacity that had led to the first division of labour.

Case Study No. 3

It is this societal pressure on women to mother that starts off Christina's spectacular rebellion in Pam Gem's *Queen Christina* (1977). Exclusively socialised as a man and raised by a surrogate father-cum-mentor in order to be fully suitable for the throne, Christina suddenly finds herself urged to marry and give birth to an heir in order to secure her succession. Unable to negotiate this schizophrenic psychological split, Gems's Christina chooses to give up her career (the throne) - the very reason why she has not developed a feminine self - and embarks on a transgressive exploration of gender and sexual identity. After experimenting with a broad range of possibilities concerning these identities - associated with various forms of feminist engagement - she ends on a note of resignation at not being able to explore a major pathway: the one normally and exclusively available for (most) women: giving birth. Despite the initial interference in her sex/gender system, by the time she discovers womanhood she can only understand it as a compound between the feminine and the female. In other words, Gems constructs Christina to expect to be both biologically and

psychologically able to conform to one of the central options of womanhood: maternity. Her failure at mothering destroys her remaining illusions and gives way to a profound regret at having been utilised as a mere object in acting out political machinations and turns into an overt (albeit hysterical) contestation of her oppressive regimes (patriarchy, in its religious, ideological and sexual facets).

Arguing that the traditional reproduction of the species had 'cost women not only emotionally, psychologically, culturally but even in strictly material (physical) terms', Firestone paved the way for the legitimisation of artificial reproduction.²⁰ In her view, artificial insemination - a technique in its very early development at the time of the book - was far from dehumanising. On the contrary, it could offer the necessary detachment for an honest re-examination of the values inherent in motherhood, since the traditional arrangement could only allow for the association of children with the displacement of ego-extension. According to Firestone, women should be freed from the 'tyranny' of reproduction and child rearing should be extended as a responsibility for the entire society, men as well as women. Partly as a consequence of such a move, women and children should be integrated immediately and completely into larger society, and self-determination should be granted for all equally.

Germaine Greer's alternative to the rearing of children was shaped around the idea/ideal of so-called 'organic families', in which adults would live communally and take care of children irrespective of direct blood-links. Each and every grown-up member of the commune would have similar responsibilities for the nurturing of children. In other words, there would be no need to privilege the relationship between the biological parent and offspring. ('The child need not even know that I

was his womb-mother and I could have relationships with the other children as well.')²¹ The major advantage of the organic family over the traditional nuclear one would lie in the fact that in this manner children could 'belong primarily to themselves' rather than being 'the extensions of their parents'.²² Although Greer did not advocate the use of technology in reproduction, she also made a case for the elimination of the immediate connection between childbearing and duty. A major cause of all evils in society, according to Greer, was what she labelled 'tyrannical nurturance', since childbearing for women had taken over all other ways of achievement and fulfilment. For Greer, bringing up children would not and should not count as a real occupation, because 'children came up just the same, brought up or not'.²³ A significant amelioration of women's condition could be instantly obtained by their refusing to marry, since independence is 'a necessary concomitant to freedom'.²⁴

Firestone's and Greer's socialist utopias were endorsed, in fact preceded, by Juliet Mitchell's early work on the integration of feminism with a socialist revolution. Before her subsequent reassessment of Freudianism for feminist purposes,²⁵ Mitchell published her influential *Women - The Longest Revolution*, a Marxist analysis of women's position in society. Mitchell pointed out that a major problem women were facing was that they were primarily perceived as women before being recognised as people. One of the demands of women's liberation had to be to redress this situation; to claim recognition for women as people in order to, subsequently, obtain full acknowledgement as women as well. Aiming at establishing a framework for a new, more viable reorganisation of the basic relations of production and reproduction, she claimed:

Socialism should properly mean not the abolition of the family, but the diversification of the socially acknowledged relationships which are today forcibly

and rigidly compressed into it. This would mean a plural range of institutions - where the family is only one, and its abolition implies none. Couples living together or not living together, long-term unions with children, single parents bringing up children, children socialised by conventional rather than biological parents, extended kin-groups, etc. - all these could be encompassed in a range of institutions which matched the free invention and variety of men and women.²⁶

Case Study No. 4

Although written more than a decade and a half later, Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* (1987) investigates a number of similar intricate links between four characters belonging to different generations. They are also connected to each other in a female lineage; however, it is the direct mother-daughter relationships that appear the most problematic and the alternative arrangements that work the best. Keatley aims at scrutinising a broad register of feelings, passions and jealousies between the protagonists, pointing out that bonds between women are not necessarily harmonious. Since none of the women in the play wanted children originally, they find the sheer practice and duty of relating to their daughters particularly challenging at times, whereas they experience the pleasure of friendship when able to develop their contacts on a more casual basis. Thus, surrogate parenting appears to have the most potential for fulfilment for all parties concerned. Keatley also addresses the issues of silencing motherhood and of trying to perform a different type of relationship instead: sisterhood. As long as all the characters stick to their prescribed roles, this arrangement works remarkably well. However, after the revelation of the actual status quo (as a result of the premature death of the grandmother, who has performed the role of mother to both granddaughter and daughter), the entire system collapses. The granddaughter denies her birth mother and opts for another alternative

arrangement: an ultimate surrogate mother-daughter bond involving her great-grandmother.

The American debate around women's oppression as a result of mothering was deployed in considerably less practical terms, being almost entirely removed from discussions on the immediate social and political terrain. American feminism in general has been influenced far less by socialism than its British counterpart, the areas of its preoccupation being mainly located in the sphere of bourgeois conservative feminism. This is perhaps one of the reasons why motherhood became such an explicit and central issue within the debate, especially towards the mid-to-late seventies. Most of the groundbreaking work on the topic that emerged at this time was mainly informed by psychoanalytic theory, anthropology and ethnography and was centred on the examination of problems facing the individual rather than the community at large. Some of the work was also markedly autobiographical, such as Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976),²⁷ thus explicitly positioning the individual at the core of any intervention.

Also a well-known poet, Rich wrote in a lyrical tone inspired by her own personal experience as a mother, blending such direct personal experiences with ethnographic observation. The crux of her thesis was the clear-cut distinction between motherhood as experience - each and every woman's potential right and opportunity to give birth and nurture children - and motherhood as institution - an arrangement regulated by patriarchal rules that operated owing to the emotional and material oppression of women. Rich wholeheartedly identified herself with the former understanding of motherhood, considering it a defining, even if at times ambivalent, experience in a woman's life. As far as motherhood as an institution was

concerned, although she stressed the inadequacies of the system, she did not offer a viable solution to suit the different experiences of women belonging to various social classes and sexual orientations. Nevertheless, both in her later work and via her subsequent personal engagement with lesbianism, she continued to elaborate more and more vocally on her initial thesis on motherhood as an instrument of patriarchal domination:

Motherhood is not only a core human relationship but a political institution, a keystone to the domination in every sphere of women by men.²⁸

Dorothy Dinnerstein's 1976 book, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* was centred upon its key chapter, originally published separately under the title 'The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World'. Although Dinnerstein acknowledged her debt to the popular saying 'The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the word', she, in fact, argued exactly the opposite in her book. Informed by psychoanalysis and object-relationist theory, Dinnerstein located the cause of women's lack of privilege in society in what she called the 'female monopoly of early child care'.²⁹ Women's (almost) exclusive role in child care in the first stages of children's lives not only restricted women's vital sphere to the confines of the home, but also perpetuated the image of women as the only viable nurturers. Caught up in an age-old vicious circle within which the perpetuation of traditional role models had rarely been challenged, the potential solution recommended by Dinnerstein was tied up with a new negotiation of the concepts of gender identity and sexual liberty between the sexes. As she put it herself, 'The project of brotherhood cannot be achieved until it includes sisters. It is inseparable from the project of sexual liberty'.³⁰

Nancy Chodorow equally posited (infant) nurturing as the cause behind women's exclusion from any significant position of power. Chodorow's extremely

influential *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* came out in 1978, but she had previously published several versions of her main argument as articles in women's studies journals, starting from about 1975. In the course of time Chodorow's theoretical base moved further from the sphere of the social and historical into the psychological and the psychoanalytical, her final version of the argument being an object-relationist analysis of mother-child relations. Unlike Dinnerstein, she distinguished between the nurturing of children of different sexes, from the perspective of the mother. In her view, mothers perceived daughters more as extensions of their selves, considering them in a symbolic sense as continuous with themselves, whereas sons were seen and urged to see themselves as different entities than the mother. Mothered by women, girls perceived themselves as less separate from the mother than boys did, and thus, were more likely to define themselves in relation to others and in general, to have more flexible ego boundaries:

In relation to their mother [girls] experience themselves as overly attached, unindividuated and without boundaries.³¹

Boys, on the other hand, were experienced as the male opposite by their mothers, thus encouraged to develop their own different interests - including the search for male role models - from the very beginning. Girls' education into acknowledging the overwhelming capacity of female nurturing and care basically excluded their introduction to other options:

As a result of having been parented by a woman, women are more likely than men to seek to be mothers, that is, to relocate themselves in a primary mother-child relationship, to get gratification from the mothering relationship, and to have psychological and relational capacities for mothering.³²

Dinnerstein's and Chodorow's work - written from neo-Freudian perspectives - is paralleled, and in some cases contradicted, by a body of work generally labelled as French feminist theory, founded on the work of Jacques Lacan and developed further, among others, by Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous.³³ Both

the American and French schools of thought addressed the mother-daughter bond, but while French theorists traced its foundations back to pregnancy and childbirth, the Americans insisted upon the subsequent process of socialisation. As Kristeva concluded regarding the differences between the two perspectives, 'The rage against mothers is not only because they take care of the child, it's because they carry it in their bodies.'³⁴

Whilst I accept as a fact that British women's theatre has predominantly responded to topical social and political issues rather than the psychoanalytical agenda, I find certain parallels with French feminist theory highly relevant. In some instances theory only confirmed the innovative contributions of earlier plays, as in the case of Ann Jellicoe's 1958 *The Sport of My Mad Mother*. Interpreted as a proto-chronic exercise of *écriture féminine*, this play prophetically illustrates Cixous's subsequent concept of writing in (the maternal) white ink as a replication of the pace and rhythm of the female body:

Woman must put herself into the text - as into the - world and into history by her own movement. [A] woman is never far from "mother". There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink.³⁵

Jellicoe's play equally performs the function of 'linguistic flesh' as theorised by Chantal Chawaf. Both aim at the 'disintellectualization' of writing and an articulation of a sensual corporeality in order to make a political statement:

For me the sensual juxtaposition of words has one function: to liberate matter, [...] develop consciousness and knowledge by liberating our unconscious as well as to bring back hope. [...] I feel that feminine writing is social, vital. Feminine language must, by its very nature, work on life passionately, scientifically, poetically, politically in order to make it invulnerable.³⁶

Though Jellicoe's Gret also implicitly invokes the intensity of the tarantella dance performed by the hysterical woman in her ritualistic process of contestation,³⁷ Catherine Clément's thesis finds further correspondences in Pam Gems's eponymous character in *Queen Christina*, as well as in Gret and Angie in Caryl Churchill's *Top*

Girls. According to Clément, through the somatisation of formerly repressed emotions the dancing hysterical subject succeeded in carrying out an immediate rebellion against the perpetrator of her oppression and hence claimed her right to agency.

However, it is Kristeva's principle of 'women's time'³⁸ that I shall apply most frequently in this study, on the grounds that several British women playwrights have rejected the perception of time as a straightforward teleological progression and introduced non-linear trajectories. According to Kristeva, female subjectivity is connected to 'cyclical time' (repetition) and 'monumental time' (eternity) as far as the perspective of motherhood and reproduction is concerned (as opposed to the time of history which is linear and deployed as a progression). Kristeva explored the various perceptions of time in relation to the different stages in the feminist movement. While the first generation of feminists claimed equal rights with men (including the right to be located in linear time), the second wave stressed sexual difference and consequently demanded women's situation outside the linear time of history and patriarchy. Rejecting both earlier options, the third generation of feminists emerging in the late seventies - with whom Kristeva identified herself - made an attempt at reconciling maternal time and linear time. This perspective not only destabilised the mutual exclusiveness between the two earlier perceptions of time but also problematised the very notion of identity in order to privilege individual differences within (rather than between) sex/gender categories. From Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother* to Churchill's *Top Girls*, from Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* to Trish Cooke's *Back Street Mammy*, time frequently diverts from linear into cyclical patterns. Connecting the present of stage time to both the past and the future, these plays also present heterogenous

rather than homogenous views of women, allowing for the co-existence of parallel practices and engineering transformations in-between different positions.

Both the pattern of repetition and the fusion between different perceptions of time connote the idea of multiplicity, explored in a different perspective by Luce Irigaray. Irigaray insisted on the symbolic merge between mother and daughter - hence on the continuity of being (cf. Kristeva's 'eternity') - in *And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other*,³⁹ and reinforced Kristeva's emphasis on the mother-daughter reunion in conditions of pregnancy and birth.⁴⁰ Located in the womb and engaged in an exchange with the maternal body, the foetus is exposed to a set of regulations imposed by the mother, regulations described by Kristeva as 'the law before the law'. Thus, Kristeva contended, language acquisition and socialisation were founded, in fact, in the maternal function, prior to the emergence of the law of the father advocated by Lacanian psychoanalysis. Kristeva's to this date most autobiographical piece - *Stabat Mater*⁴¹ - written in two columns to describe both her personal experience of motherhood - argued for the need to re-evaluate the very concept of maternity. Kristeva claimed that Western images of maternity, epitomised by the cult of the Virgin Mary, did not construct the figure of the mother as a speaking subject and hence - as she contended in *Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini* - were just as inadequate as science in providing an acceptable account of motherhood.

With regard to British work on the topic, the well-known birth expert and author Sheila Kitzinger published several titles in the late seventies, including *Women as Mothers* (1978).⁴² Kitzinger assumed a rather essentialist approach to motherhood, taking for granted the fact that women would want to give birth and then dedicate exclusive time to nurturing ('Childrearing is not an interval in a woman's life but its *raison d'être*.')⁴³ Kitzinger's work is nevertheless, particularly

relevant in the context of this chapter owing to the fact that she was one of the first British writers who offered an ethnographic analysis of the conditions of mothering.⁴⁴ Her observations on the actual details of pregnancy and birth were extremely topical, forerunning an entire literature on the potential dangers of late first pregnancies and the objectification of women by the medical profession in general, and obstetrics and gynaecology in particular:

Grateful as most women are for all this care and awed by the advanced technology, it is not difficult to understand how a women can feel that she is merely a container for a foetus, [...] that her body is an inconvenient barrier to easy access [...] that if she were not around the pregnancy could progress with more efficiency.⁴⁵

Kitzinger also stressed how difficult it was for women to establish an emotional relationship with their newly born babies in conditions of interference by the medical system.⁴⁶ Obstetricians - as opposed to midwives whom she presented as a relatively powerless category - had exercised an exaggerated amount of medical control over women.⁴⁷ Kitzinger interpreted such gradually intruding iatrogenic factors as attempts to de-sex and de-centre the labouring woman, with the aim of exclusively focusing on the forthcoming baby.

Case Study No. 5

Several playwrights discuss the extraordinary control and manipulative power available to the medical profession. Consultants, GPs, nurses and fertility clinics feature at length, especially in the plays that deal with thirty-something women's desire for mothering. Michelene Wandor's *AID Thy Neighbour* (1978), Claire Luckham's *The Choice* (1992) and Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Break Of Day* (1995) centre on women who are prepared for major sacrifices in both material and

psychological terms, in order to have a baby. In all cases this desire for a baby has emerged after a long period of childlessness and is associated with a wish to start a new stage in life. Wandor juxtaposes a straight and a lesbian couple, whereas Wertenbaker parallels the fertility treatment of Tess with Nina's quest for a baby via adoption.

Owing to their ages, neither Tess nor Mary (the straight mother-to-be in *AID Thy Neighbour*) can get pregnant without medical assistance. However, as soon as they approach the clinic they are literally eliminated from discourse, lose their agency and are instantly transformed into objects of medical scrutiny. Luckham also locates Sal (*The Choice*) as a mere object of medical experimentation. In her case, however, the ultimate goal is not conception but the 'production' of a healthy baby. Since she is older than the average first-time mother she is forced to undergo a number of tests in order to screen out potential foetal diseases, whilst her own health and psychological state is of no concern to anyone. Eventually, when the results announce a very high likelihood of disability, she is urged to terminate her pregnancy, as a handicapped baby would contravene the system's obsession with perfection.

This sudden lack of medical interest in the baby not only confuses Sal but also causes a serious conflict with her partner. Tess similarly experiences marital problems as a result of her prolonged and unsuccessful treatment. Thus, according to Luckham and Wertenbaker, medical control not only objectifies women but also disconnects them from their partnerships and support networks. Unable to accept defeat, Tess sublimates her previous longing for a baby into a desire to understand the causes behind events. Sal, on the other hand, has no energy to challenge the medical advice-cum-order and gets her pregnancy terminated. Eventually, however,

she announces her intention to try again for a baby, thus reconnecting with her partner and her previous self, and becoming capable of adhering to her own agenda.

The entire issue of who is in control of birth became, in fact, a central component of the debate on parenting from the late seventies onwards. With the advent of artificial reproductive technologies the possibilities have gained almost limitless proportions, and the role of women within the process of reproduction has ranged across the board from the totally powerless object of male experimentation to the fully empowered and self-conscious subject.

1. 4 Reproductive Technologies:

(Male) Medical Colonisation or the Empowerment of the (Female) Self

Britain has been at the forefront of research into artificial reproduction since the emergence of the concept in the late sixties and early seventies. One of the first heavily publicised results of this research was the birth of the world's first test-tube baby, Louise Brown, in 1978. The success was associated with the names of Robert Edwards, a Cambridge scientist, and Patrick Steptoe, a gynaecologist from Oldham, who were operating the Bourn Hall private research and consultancy clinic, just outside Cambridge. The technique used for the conception of Brown was the then brand new method of IVF (in vitro fertilisation), though the Browns were not aware of the fact that they were involved as human guinea pigs in the experimentation of a totally new area in science.⁴⁸

Following this first case of success, in a few years' time the birth of several other test-tube babies (also in Australia and America) was achieved, as well as

further developments, such as frozen IVF babies,⁴⁹ research on surplus human embryos or the implantation of eggs from one woman to another.⁵⁰ Despite an initially negative first reaction to IVF, the British scene for genetic engineering soon gained its best-known representative in the person of Lord Robert Winston. Based at his own clinic in London, Winston not only began an intensive research but also a vocal propaganda campaign on artificial reproduction. Winston's dedication to his discipline was best tested in a lengthy public debate (lasting over five years, starting from 1984) over the pros and cons of artificial reproduction with the Conservative MP, Enoch Powell. A fervent opponent of research into reproductive technologies, Powell was trying to pass the 'Unborn Child (Protection) Bill' through Parliament that would ban all experiments, as he was particularly upset by the - from his point of view - failure of the decisions reached in 1984 by the Warnock Committee.

This committee, led by Mary Warnock, had a mandate to look into the debate on the ethical aspects of alternative ways of parenting, including IVF, and also adoption and surrogate parenting. After prolonged discussions and consultations with experts, patients and hopeful parents-to-be, the committee made a number of decisions published in a report (known as the Warnock Report)⁵¹ that became strictly reinforced. A clear aim arising from the Report was the preservation of the traditional family pattern. Surrogate parenting (especially in commercial circumstances) was outlawed and artificial inseminations or IVF procedures were only allowed in the case of heterosexual couples. Lesbian or gay parenting was still regarded more or less a disgrace, and according to the decision of the Committee, could not be supported by clinics or institutions affiliated to the NHS. Nevertheless, innumerable cases of especially lesbian mothering have been documented in the late seventies and early eighties.

Case Study No. 6

Micheline Wandor's 1978 play, *AID Thy Neighbour* was prompted by then contemporary media debates around lesbian mothers. Her aim with the play was to do justice to the legitimacy of maternal desire coming from anyone, irrespective of sexual orientation, and gave full-hearted support, both within and outside the play, to the expecting lesbian couple hounded by the tabloid press. Wandor opposes a lesbian couple's longing for a baby to a similar quest on behalf of a neighbouring heterosexual couple. As they mutually confess their intention to start a family at the beginning of the play, the entire plot appears as an intense competition between the two couples. In order to give them a sense of an equal chance, Wandor confronts the heterosexual couple with a fertility problem, whereas the lesbian couple needs to locate a suitable donor in order to proceed with artificial insemination. Though the scenes move to and fro between the world of the straight couple and that of the lesbian couple, they predominantly highlight the physiological difficulties Mary and John are experiencing. In contrast to the strict medical control that Mary is subject to, Wandor highlights the simplicity with which Georgina is eventually inseminated. Not only does this latter procedure happen without any technical or physiological difficulty but the syringe itself is operated by Sandy, instead of a representative of the medical system. Thus, Sandy metaphorically reclaims control over parenthood, instead of sharing it with the medical profession. Her gesture, acting also as an extension of the sexual act, eliminates everyone else - but Georgina and herself - from the intimacy of conception and parenting.

From the perspective of scientific research, the Warnock Report agreed eventually to a compromise, allowing experiments on embryos until they reach fourteen days of development.⁵² Later issues that came up in connection with research on reproductive technologies shifted the focus from merely offering wider chances for birth to monitoring the 'quality' of newly born babies. Stemming from Lord Winston's attempt at ruling out genetic diseases, an independent domain of related research was initiated via the analysis of cells removed from the embryo. Depending on the results obtained with regard to future health hazards, termination or continuation of development has been recommended, thus consolidating even further the role of medical expertise as a decisive factor in reproduction.

Case Study No. 7

In *The Choice* (1992) Claire Luckham dramatised the adequacy of a foetus to a certain standard of perfection. Written in the wake of the debate on 'designer babies', Luckham's play calls attention to the manipulative power inherent in the medical profession as far as deciding an individual's future is concerned. The play raises issues such as who is in control of fertility, who takes the decisions over the chances for life, what are the limits of medical intrusion into one's privacy when assistance has been requested etc. Luckham also investigates how far the main character, Sal, can cope with self-consciously resisting the medical system. Though she initially appears sceptical, she gradually loses her energy and eventually finds herself conforming to the precise indications given by her consultant. Not only does she go

through all the recommended tests to assure that her foetus is healthy, but when it is found out that the baby might be born with a congenital disease she agrees to have an abortion rather than give birth to a disabled child. In this final decision she even disregards Robert's, her partner's, wish to have the baby regardless and learn to cope with the situation. In other words, in her relationship with Robert she replicates the power scenario she is subject to in the medical world. Just as her voice is not taken into account by her consultant, she chooses to ignore her partner's desire for parenting. According to Luckham, therefore, the choice stipulated in the title belongs to the medical profession first and foremost. Subsequently, it is imposed upon the gestating mother who has no energy and confidence left to contest it. The partner is non-represented in this decision and, as a result, he refuses to acknowledge the abortion; continuing to project himself into an imaginary world of fatherhood - establishing a virtual connection between himself and the foetus - from which, in his turn, he chooses to exclude everyone else.

As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, no definite ethical or legal measure has been taken yet with regard to the ultimate technologisation of reproduction, despite repeated attempts. The latest development on this terrain, however, pushes the ethical dilemma even further. Following the success of animal cloning culminating in the birth of Dolly the sheep, research has turned towards the possibilities of human cloning. Owing to the very strong ethical taboo,⁵³ at the moment the only accepted aspect of human cloning refers to the so-called cloning for medical purposes. According to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) and the Human Genetics Advisory Commission (HGAC) put forward in December 1998, human cloning should be ruled out but research into therapeutic

cloning could be beneficial, as it could potentially provide 'medical benefits' for the likes of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's Diseases.⁵⁴

A considerably more positive reception greeted the lifting of the ban in January 2000 on freezing and storing eggs harvested from (relatively young) women. As a result of this procedure women can potentially delay motherhood for decades, not being rushed any longer by the age-related decrease in producing suitable eggs for conception.⁵⁵ Fertilising previously harvested eggs would especially be advantageous in the case of women suffering from cancer, as thus they could have the opportunity to mother their genetically related children, though it could also help career women to delay starting a family.⁵⁶

December 2000 witnessed another legal approach to research on embryos. Two MPs (Ann Begg and Fiona MacTaggart, disabled and suffering from multiple sclerosis respectively) urged the House of Commons to vote on 'stem cell research', using embryos up to fourteen days old.⁵⁷ According to this technique, cells would be removed from either the embryos or the placenta of newly born babies and stored, in order to subsequently be used in the regeneration of diseased tissue in cases such as leukaemia.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the moral taboo against the so-called 'designer babies' continued to be extremely strong. Following the highly publicised Nash case in America and that of a Scottish couple, Alan and Louise Masterton,⁵⁹ the issue of the genetic manipulation of embryos returned to the core of both public and scientific scrutiny. While scientists such as Paul Serhal plead for 'pre-implantation genetic diagnosis' - growing embryos outside the womb with IVF, testing to check that they do not carry genes for disease so that only healthy ones get implanted - the HFEA is sceptical with regard to women's routine screening for genetic disorders.⁶⁰

In the feminist interpretation reproductive technologies have encompassed a broader territory. Michelle Stanworth identified four such distinct categories, including the control of fertility, either through the prevention of conception or termination; technologies utilised in the process of childbirth (drugs to induce birth, caesareans etc.); technologies aimed at monitoring the health of the foetus (amniocentesis, ultrasound scans) and finally technologies that assist conception.⁶¹ As far as this latter category of overcoming fertility is concerned feminist scholarship and propaganda has basically centred upon two opposing points of view. One has regarded science as a progressive medium that offers ways out over natural obstacles and, hence, possibilities to 'extend the pleasures of parenthood'. The other has seen technology as a potential source of danger that triggers new risks to patients. It has also focused on the possibilities available to scientists to manipulate life itself and hence apply eugenic policies at their own discretion. A representative of one of the most vocal pressure groups against RT - FINNRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering) - declared that RT was a 'violation of the human rights of women';⁶² while Gena Corea contended that RT was 'imposed on women as a class'.⁶³ Both Corea and Renate Duelli Klein had in the meantime published their own volumes documenting their radical opposition to RT and genetic engineering. Klein's collection, edited in collaboration with Rita Arditti and Shelley Minden,⁶⁴ aimed at demonstrating women's total lack of real choice when it came to RT. The very title of their book - *Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood?* - suggested, in fact, that in their view all the research was carried out exclusively at the expense of women; therefore not the babies but the women were being experimented on. Corea's book⁶⁵ explained the rise of RT and genetic engineering as a branch of science through man's ceaseless obsession with

creating a human being by himself. She referred back to the legend of the Golem in medieval Jewish mysticism, as well as to the alchemists' homunculus to be created from boys' urine, blood and sperm. Related to the previous idea of men being solely in charge of reproduction, Corea's thesis equally emphasised the fact that the medical profession not only succeeded in dominating women but also made them linguistically invisible. Drawing on the Warnock Report, she illustrated the ways in which the discussion never included references to 'women' or 'mothers', focusing instead on terms such as 'parents', 'the couple', 'patients' or 'egg-donor'.

1.5 Mothering Revisited:

Multiple Voices in Eighties and Nineties Feminist Thinking

Concerning the more recent theoretical debates, both younger and older feminists have tried to circumscribe the meanings associated with mothering, in a body of work that is overwhelming both in range and scope. It covers ethnographic accounts but also investigations into philosophy and the arts or sociology. Ann Dally,⁶⁶ for instance, emphasised the aspect of self-fulfilment inherent in mothering. She also saw it as a maturing experience, an ambition and project that marked genuine adulthood. Often motherhood was undertaken in order to please or punish partners and/or members of family, or just because everyone else was doing it.

Case Study No. 8

Trish Cooke's 1989 play, *Back Street Mammy*, deals in one of its strands with a teenager's compulsion with replicating her role models. On the one hand, she is obsessed with sexual experimentation, while on the other she is confronted with unplanned pregnancies and failed relationships. All the women surrounding Dynette, in fact, profoundly regret not having enjoyed the single life longer. They project their unfulfilled dreams onto her and expect that she will achieve an education and social status nobody in the family has previously had access to. Although Dynette herself is interested in continuing her studies, she equally longs to share the experiences of others, and so accepts the first one-night-stand offer without hesitation. Despite not being enjoyable, this sexual act allows her a certain degree of liberation and frees her from previously unsettling apprehension. Preoccupied with the possibility of dissociating love from sex, she ignores the connection between sex and children until her pregnancy is confirmed. Though unprepared for motherhood, she tries to follow the model of her female lineage before yielding to her sister and requesting an abortion. Being a Catholic, this move triggers a profound and long-lasting trauma that only ceases when Dynette convinces herself that it is acceptable to 'postpone' giving birth.

Cooke captures this later stage in the second strand where Dynette is already thirty, has achieved a career and has both a baby and a husband. This strand responds to most issues examined in the first one; through the lens of Jackie, Dynette's childhood friend also aged thirty. For Jackie, replicating other women is just as

compelling as it was once for the teenage Dynette. However, in her case the desire for a baby is amplified by the pressure arising from the 'ticking of her biological clock'. Not only is Jackie facing difficulties because of not having a stable partner, but also as a result of not being able to identify any aspect of self worth without producing a baby. Unlike the case of Dynette, where past and present are juxtaposed and a happy ending is envisaged, for Jackie no immediate solution is offered. On the one hand, Cooke ends on a reinforcement of desire, reminiscent of Dynette's original urge to act and symbolically *become* one of her forerunners; but on the other, she suggests that Jackie succeeds in sublimating her craving for a baby into a new quest, this time for spiritual discoveries.

Sara Ruddick aimed her principle of 'maternal thinking' at the establishment of a utopian sense of harmony and overall peace. Ruddick associated the birth of children with a potential for hope, both from the perspective of the 'old' world and of the newly born infant:

The hope of the world, of birthing women, mothers, friends and kin rests in the new-born infant. The infant's hope resides in the world's welcome.⁶⁷

Ruddick described mothers as peacemakers, and stressed their shared suspicion of violence and willingness for reconciliation. Mothers' work had the potential to create what she termed 'women's politics of resistance', inspired by the act and symbolism of birth as well as the responsibility for care and protection. In fact, for Ruddick, motherhood was an experience that resulted after the blending of several activities: physical, emotional and intellectual, and 'maternal thinking' was achieved via the unity of reflection, judgement and emotion. Concerning future arrangements around the negotiation of gender relations, Ruddick made a clear commitment concerning the involvement of male partners. In her view, current mothers needed men who

could 'mother' not only in order to share the responsibility of nurturing children, but also because women needed mothering themselves:

There will be mothers of both sexes who live out a transformed maternal thought in communities that share parental care - practically, emotionally, economically and socially.⁶⁸

Tuula Gordon, author of *Feminist Mothers* put a similar idea in slightly different terms. She claimed that it was not equality that should be sought first and foremost, but rather one should wish for a society where 'the experience of having children could be a pleasure to all parents, male and female'.⁶⁹

Case Study No. 9

Though centred on motherhood, several plays also investigate the phenomenon of fatherhood. Both Ray, Sal's partner, in Claire Luckham's *The Choice* and John, Mary's husband, in Michelene Wandor's *AID Thy Neighbour* come across as extremely committed to having a baby. (Luckham even points out that it was, in fact, Ray who first wanted a child.) It is Ray again who takes longer to come to terms with Sal's abortion, and finds refuge in a fantasy world where he communicates with the foetus. As a parallel to his symbolic exclusion from the decision taking with regard to the termination, he literally excludes Sal from the space where he keeps in virtual touch with the foetus. As he is an artist, this contact is also materialised in portraits of what he imagines the foetus to be like - assembled into an album that acts as his version not only of artistic but also of parental creativity. This latter image is even more powerful when confronted with Ray's earlier statement that he would have liked to give birth to the baby himself. Thus, in spite of his earlier womb-envy, Ray

succeeds in sublimating his fantasy into art and is offered the chance to live out his paternal potential.

Wandor equally forces John to come to terms with his wife's unilateral decision not to try for a baby any longer. Mary's situation is comparable to Sal's to the extent that she is also at the mercy of the medical profession; but while in Sal's case their exclusive concern is for the welfare of the foetus, in Mary's the focus of attention is her fertility problem. Wandor presents Mary's constant objectification and the ways that she is treated without any respect as a woman or as a human being. With the decision to give up trying, Wandor re-asserts Mary's need to return to normality and personhood. Since John does not understand Mary's reasons for giving up, he feels betrayed and excluded and keeps on persuading her to try over and over again. Eventually, he finds the only available pathway, in the given circumstances, towards materialising his paternal fantasies: by offering his babysitting services to the neighbouring couple.

As far as the sexual division of labour in parenting is concerned, the conditions of mothering have not changed in a decisive manner, according to statistics, since the debate was started in the early seventies. Most feminists writing today have emphasised that as long as childcare is primarily women's responsibility, their position will be one of subordination in society at large. In Joyce Trebilcot's words, a strategy for feminist activists should be to work at the institutional level and restructure the day-to-day childcare, so that this would not any longer be 'the primary responsibility of mothers and their female relatives'.⁷⁰ It is especially younger feminists who have favoured such an alternative, connecting it to a broader-scale negotiation of feminist claims with the world of men: 'A new feminism is

needed that sees the possibility of rapprochement between the sexes'.⁷¹ Having opened up the possibility of parenthood for everyone though, a constant preoccupation needs to remain the vigilant monitoring of any potential child abuse and harassment (battery and incest).

Writing in 1985, the radical lesbian feminist bell hooks voiced her ambivalent response to the resurgence of interest in motherhood.⁷² She acknowledged the need for researching female parenthood, yet she equally warned of the tendency to romanticise motherhood. She especially found the so-called 'motherist movement' harmful, as it coincided with traditional misogynist discourse through its biological essentialism and the identification of women primarily in terms of their reproductive capacities. Terms that came up in the course of the eighties debate on this special, nurturing quality of women included 'caring ethic' and 'contextual thinking' and to a certain extent, the idea of the 'different voice' initiated by Carol Gilligan.⁷³ According maternal or cultural feminists, mothering was the supreme route towards a woman's emotional fulfilment, whereas childless women were not only utterly selfish but also failed with regard to femininity.⁷⁴ 'Maternal revivalism', in Lynne Segal's view, emerged as part of a process of withdrawal from public struggles when women did not achieve sufficient satisfaction in other areas of life:

The new focus on mothering, the maternal revival in feminism, has come partly from feminists' disappointment that our aspirations to engage in creative and rewarding work, to struggle for social change, to build warm and supportive communal spaces and friendship networks - as well as to choose to have children - have proved so often difficult, stressful and transitory.⁷⁵

Segal, in fact, offered a critique of the tendency to ignore the importance of mothering. 'Maternal revivalism' basically meant for her an enhanced emphasis on motherhood as a source of power and pleasure for women, though it also addressed the inherent difference between the sexes. Ann Oakley's *Becoming a Mother* equally

contained a strong maternal revivalist thesis, concluding that motherhood was not just a handicap 'but also a strength, a trial and error, an achievement and a prize'.⁷⁶

1.6 Motherhood versus Career: The Case Study of Bourgeois Feminism

Throughout the eighties and early nineties issues already identified, yet unresolved in the previous decades, remained at the forefront, such as the questioning of the operation of motherhood as an institution. The analysis of the complexity of desires associated with mothering was a priority, as well as the right to choose not to be a mother. Perhaps the most widely debated practical issue arising from any discussion on motherhood continued to be the negotiation of paid work with parenting, both in full-time or part-time versions. Melissa Benn addressed the possibility of combining motherhood and work outside the home, and brought forward emblematic examples in order to illustrate successful cases, such as Labour MP, Harriet Harman or the Hollywood actress Demi Moore. The moments she focused on captured Harman, pregnant, campaigning for Parliament in 1983 and Moore in her famous pregnant nude photo that appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1991. Benn emphasised the narcissistic element inherent in Moore's gesture, but also pointed out the importance of 'pushing out the boundaries of motherhood'.⁷⁷ While Moore's stance indicated the very nineties idea of making it possible to have a career, be a mother and still be very attractive, Harman's attempt at both political career and motherhood was more of a proto-chronic event in the early eighties. In spite of the image transmitted by Harman, the eighties basically connoted a period of rejection or concealment as far as motherhood was concerned. Women's magazines carried

headlines such as ‘babies, who needs them?’ or claimed that one in five women said ‘no’ to motherhood.

In the words of Julie Burchill, someone who achieved notoriety in the eighties and opted out of motherhood herself,

A certain sort of woman [...] came up in the eighties, [...] a woman who was bloody stropky, wanted to have a laugh, wanted to have loads of money, wanted to have her own way’.⁷⁸

Being career-conscious and exclusively focused on achievement became the standard for the eighties, in some cases allowing for a profound discrepancy as far as the construction of social gender - versus the maintenance of what might be termed natural gender - was concerned. The insistent preservation of an enhanced feminine look was often paired with a strong sense of power and control, perhaps most famously in the case of Margaret Thatcher and the American pop singer and actress Madonna. In her book on Conservative women, Beatrix Campbell tackled the construction and significance of Thatcher’s image. Campbell concluded that ‘in the public mind Thatcher belong[ed] to one sex but could be either’ and that, in fact, she was more than either since she encompassed the simultaneous identities of a warrior PM and an ideologically neutral housewife. However, Campbell also made the point that for Thatcher femininity was a role that she wore outwardly, whereas masculinity was what she really admired. She wanted to be a woman who could do what men did.⁷⁹ Both Thatcher and Madonna, in their different ways and in different spheres of the popular imagination, came to assume iconic status for the decade, as Burchill subsequently contended:

The eighties saw the emergence of what can only be called Bourgeois Feminist Triumphalism, exemplified by Margaret Thatcher in number 10, Martina Navratilova on the clay courts, Joan Collins on TV and strident starlets like Janet Jackson in the charts. But undoubtedly the First Lady of Bourgeois Feminist Triumphalism is Madonna.⁸⁰

Although Thatcher herself did have children in her youth and continued to project a set of parallel images including both the 'Iron Lady'-super-stateswoman and the ordinary wife and mother, her wifely and motherly routines clearly differed from those of the average women. Owing to her dominating presence in the political sphere her motherhood ended up restricted to a sort of mythical status to which none of the ordinary women could relate. She 'embodie[d] female power which unite[d] patriarchal and feminine discourses', yet 'she has not feminised politics, but she has offered feminine endorsement to patriarchal power and principles'.⁸¹ Those ordinary women who nevertheless opted for having babies without abandoning their careers altogether, found themselves returning to work earlier and earlier.⁸²

Case Study No. 10

Caryl Churchill's 'Bourgeois Triumphalist' heroine in *Top Girls*, Marlene, overdoes even this latter practice. She simply abandons her daughter, leading her life as an unattached woman and starting a career in London. In the meantime, her daughter - raised by her working-class sister in rural England - is unaware of her exact history, while perhaps intuitively suspecting the truth. In order to maintain her success and upward social mobility, Marlene minimises her contact with her sister and daughter. Having adopted a tough Thatcherite line she has basically nothing in common any longer with her Leftist sister, and, in fact, even their rare moments of reunion end up in ideological confrontation. Their divergent views, however, do not cover only party politics but extend to all areas of day-to-day life. The crux of their conflict tends to return to the future of Angie, Marlene's biological - and at the same time Joyce's

surrogate - daughter. While, for Marlene, Angie is a straightforward case of sheer dismissal, for Joyce she is a constant preoccupation. Joyce, though aware of Angie's modest intellectual potential, displays genuine concern, whereas Marlene adopts her office routine, according to which one either fits or does not into the requirements of the eighties quest for power and success. Since Angie is clearly unsuited to any sort of work even remotely connected to an executive career, she is instantly declared a failure and unworthy of further attention. For Marlene - as well as for Marion, Churchill's pre-Thatcherite protagonist in *Owners* - the rules of the game exclude taking family bonds into account, and they consistently disregard them equally in their own case and in that of others. Both have made their careers on exclusively male terms, and, according to Churchill, their successes are neither tributary to nor beneficial for any sort of genuine women-identified project.

Opponents of bourgeois feminism or power-feminism labelled the trend as 'macho feminism' or 'female machismo', considering the over-ambitious career woman to be as incompatible with 'femininity'. This latter term itself was coined by Betty Friedan and widely used in her 1981 re-evaluation of her position on feminism. *The Second Stage* was a Reaganite investigation of women's role in society in the early eighties and was targeted at relocating women at the core of the family circle, seen as 'the base of their identity and human control'.⁸³ Friedan claimed that the women's movement had gone too far, especially in terms of sexual politics and the choice to have or not to have children.

When Burchill located Madonna as an iconic figure for the eighties, Madonna was still childless and under thirty; starting from the mid-nineties and her personal experience of motherhood, however, she has taken a different route. In a sense,

Madonna's shift from the eighties career-focus to a more private, family-centred attitude re-enacted the overall transformations in-between the two decades. Somewhere between the two decades the 'Having It All' slogan emerged, but while from the perspective of the eighties it meant being a superwoman, from the point of view of the nineties it was rather a combination of career, children and a satisfactory relationship. Instead of choosing between a baby and a briefcase (the symbol of eighties power-feminism) women started to value the importance of both options, not willing to prioritise the legitimacy of one over the other.

The late nineties and the turn to the new millennium provided an unprecedented range of highly publicised instances in terms of celebrity mothering.⁸⁴ Annie Leibovitz's 1998 photo of the breast-feeding Jerry Hall directly replicated the conventions of Christian religious portraiture, while Cindy Crawford, Jodie Foster or Kate Winslet would also pose with their babies as 'The Madonna and Child'. The press reported in detail on the ways in which actresses, singers and supermodels coped with pregnancy whilst being present on screen, stage or the catwalk. Members of the Spice Girls and All Saints pop groups continued to perform while pregnant, as did Catherine Zeta-Jones in the Hollywood movie *Traffic*. Madonna (the singer) gave her first British concert in years shortly after the birth of her second child in the autumn of 2000, sporting a top with the names of her children inscribed on the front and at the back. Cherie Booth, lawyer and wife of Labour PM Tony Blair, has also offered a remarkable merge of identities, both public and private. However, it was her pregnancy with their fourth child in late 1999 and early 2000 that called most attention to her juggling the status of a career woman with that of a mother, alongside her duties as a leading politician's wife. In terms of press coverage her

fertility and motherhood were instantly valued more, especially by the previously hostile Conservative press.⁸⁵

1.7 'Having It All'?

Alternatives for the Late Nineties and the Third Millennium

However, as most of the writing on the topic demonstrated, the result of such a double-load was, for many women, exhaustion, and a certain degree of frustration. Reactions included a range of divergent tones, from straightforward rejections of careers, to warnings against the 'superwoman burn-out'. One author signalled a need to rephrase the catch phrase from 'Having It All' to 'Doing It All'.⁸⁶ Erica Jong also highlighted this attitude of internal backlash, contending that by having attempted to be successful on all terrains women 'have won the right to be terminally exhausted'.⁸⁷ Maeve Haran's novel, *Having It All*, perceived as the voice of this new generation of women, did not suggest giving up anything that a woman considered important for her self, career or family. The solution lay in setting the terms of the involvement with all these preoccupations according to one's personal needs, rather than accepting pre-defined standards as previously:

Power. Money. Success. And a happy family. Liz really believed she could have it all. So when she's offered one of the most important jobs in television she jumps at it. But Liz discovered that there's a price to be paid for her success and that the whole glittering image is just an illusion. And one day she's faced with the choice she thought she'd never have to make. Liz decides she will have it all - but on her own terms.⁸⁸

Natasha Walter, author of *The New Feminism* (1998), reworked the same concern in less radical terms when she translated her hope that young professional women would not have to pay an extreme price in terms of their careers in order to have children.

As opposed to this tendency towards self-assurance and defiance of confining stereotypes, older feminists and social scientists conveyed a different picture. LSE researcher Catherine Hakim published a study according to which two-thirds of women wanted to be homemakers; feminism, as a theory and a movement being directed only to the remaining one-third. Hakim, in fact, established a polar opposite between the model of the 'homemaker' and the 'career woman'; the former perceiving 'wage work as an *extension* of her homemaking role, not an *alternative* to it', and the latter seeking gratification through paid work and 'competing on the same terms as men'.⁸⁹ Margaret O'Brien observed that children of full-time working mothers were doing less well at school than those of women working only part-time. For Rosalind Coward, author of *Our Treacherous Hearts* (1993) and *Sacred Cows* (1999), women's new trend of returning home in order to have children after having had access to the world of careers problematised women's pleasure with motherhood. Sheila Kitzinger, an advocate of the so-called 'babymoon' - the special time of getting used to the enjoyment of motherhood - also warned of the problems that women might experience when getting back to work too early after childbirth. She considered it a real failure of post-feminism that not only denied women a natural connection to children, but also tolerated 'inhumanity', to mother, child and father. A way out, in Benn's understanding, would be to remind everyone in a position of responsibility - including feminists and those in government - of the need to take a responsible attitude to parenthood:

Feminism must not, along with government, forget that bringing up children is a form of work; neither motherhood nor fatherhood should need so much justification beyond itself.⁹⁰

From the perspective of at least some male members of the Government and leading male social scientists, however, tremendous progress has already taken place.

According to Anthony Giddens, director of the LSE, author of the influential 'third-way theory' and advisor to the PM, the position of women in society has been effectively transformed. In his view 'new worlds have opened for [women] which did not exist before', as a consequence of which 'the structural basis of society is shifting, not disintegrating'.⁹¹ While Giddens's statement was probably accurate regarding women of a certain social background and education, he and several other commentators and politicians seemed to ignore the fact that for hundreds of thousands of underprivileged women this entire debate on post-feminism and careers was and still is devoid of content. As far as these women were concerned, having a child, sometimes in their mid-teens, was the natural thing to do. It was what they had seen in their environment and perhaps, in Angela Yuval-Davis' words, this was the way for them 'to convince themselves that they are alive and creative human beings'.⁹² Both the Conservative and the current Government's attempts to 'help' these lone mothers back to work as soon as possible after giving birth represented, in fact, a patronising interference with the lives of these women. In conditions when childcare is either non-existent or too expensive, being pushed into what Natasha Walter called 'an outdated working culture' could hardly constitute a journey away from poverty.

Closely connected to the conditions in which women opt for having children is the position of men in relation to childcare and family. While some older feminists still talk about the importance of gender warfare, other representatives of the second-wave generation, such as Rosalind Coward, Maggie Gee or Fay Weldon, have found such a gender conflict dated. In fact, they suggested that it was men who were becoming increasingly underprivileged, suffering from unemployment and disaffection. Coward in *Sacred Cows* (1999) went as far as to claim that she had

become 'disenchanted with the idea of being a feminist'. In her view feminism could not handle the fact that individual men were just as vulnerable against female potency as women when facing patriarchy. Perhaps not surprisingly, Coward's book stirred a wave of passionate reactions in the media. Most of the opinions, however, dismissed the book. It was interpreted either as an example of female 'triumphalism' and hence a corruption of feminism (by younger writers, such as Zoe Heller or Natasha Walter),⁹³ or as a text that chose to ignore some of the facts with relation to the development of feminism over the decades (Beatrix Campbell).⁹⁴

Germaine Greer's 1999 sequel to *The Female Eunuch*, intertextually entitled *The Whole Woman*, also addressed the issue of male insecurities arising from the decreasing prestige of the working man. She referred, for instance, to the setting up in 1996 of the Organisation for the Concern of the Family, campaigning for the 'Feminine Woman' and for the resurgence of traditional gender stereotypes and sex roles. While in 1970 Greer argued that motherhood did not need to be and should not be regarded as a substitute career, in 1999 she claimed that motherhood did by all means deserve to be regarded as a genuine career option. She insisted, however, that the choice whether to stay in employment and pay for childcare or stay at home and raise the children should belong exclusively to the mother. In order for women to be able to reach better informed decisions, Greer called for more investment in institutional childcare and urged for the addressing of the issue of 'dignified motherhood' as a feminist priority.

At a time when most feminists active in second-wave feminism revisit their earlier positions and when younger feminists voice a belief in post-feminism, new feminism or the joys of housewifery,⁹⁵ there is still quite a long way to go until some sort of consensus is reached. On the one hand, there is reason for celebration, since

feminism has gone a long way and has irreversibly transformed the patterns of family life and the choices available for women, either single or attached. Coote and Campbell acknowledged as early as 1982 that:

Since the late 1960s many women have tried - individually and collectively - to break out of the conventional mould of family life. They have waged guerrilla warfare over the housework. They have 'nagged' and 'scolded' to get men change their habits. They have fought for their own space within the household. They have 'reversed roles', leaving their husbands with the kids while they go out to work. They have lived communally with other men and women. They have set up networks of 'women's houses' in towns and cities throughout the country. All this has been intrinsic to feminist politics since the birth of the women's liberation movement.⁹⁶

On the other hand, no comparable steps have been taken for a satisfactory resolution to the experience of parenthood and motherhood. Following the zenith of research on mothering in the late seventies, neither feminist scholarship nor governmental institutions have granted sufficient attention to the practical details of this matter in the last decades of the twentieth century. At the start of the third millennium more ideas and actions are needed:

It seems a pity that [feminism] still is not able to be a political voice that reflects the experience of motherhood, motherhood as both the affirmation of, and one crucial metaphor for, all that really matters for life!⁹⁷

In such a situation the comments and contribution of women playwrights become especially important. Though theatre cannot engineer overnight social change, it can and does participate in a gradual process of consciousness raising, despite the current lack of belief in grand narratives and in the instant panacea of ideologies. As there is no overarching feminist standpoint, there is no ultimate artistic direction either, to be shared by all playwrights. On both terrains, there are mutations and diversity: emblematic for the multiplicity and continuous transformation of human experience.

¹ Charlotte Keatley, Introduction, *My Mother Said I Never Should* (London: Methuen Drama in association with Oxford Stage Company, 1997), p. xvi.

² E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 17.

³ Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 137.

⁴ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 284.

⁵ Wilson also contended in her overview of women in post-war Britain that the welfare state did not live up to the expectations of creating a network of social services that 'could support and legitimate the homemaking role of women'. Cf. Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968* (London: Tavistock, 1980), p. 40.

⁶ Cf. the work of Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott and Benjamin Spock on the importance of constant attention and love in the upbringing of children. While it was considered permissible for mothers to leave their babies in the care of fathers or grannies in cases of emergency, 'the exacting job [of motherhood was] scamped at one's peril'. John Bowlby, quoted in Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 101.

⁷ Myrdal and Klein, p. 117.

⁸ Margaret Stacey, letter to Elizabeth Wilson, in Wilson, 1980, p. 47.

⁹ In Elizabeth Baker's 1921 *Partnership* the protagonist, Kate Rolling continues to keep her business despite being involved in a romance, while in Kate O'Brien's *Distinguished Villa* (1926) Francis Llewellyn refuses to marry an attractive man in order to continue working in a library. Aimee and Philip Stuart's 1929 *Her Shop* celebrates Lady Torrent's independent commercial ambition and success, despite her husband's reservations, while *Nine Till Six* (1930), also by Aimee and Philip Stuart, centres on the fifty-five year old Mrs Pembroke who has worked in retail since her teenage years, and examines the nature of work and working life, as well as the relationships between employers and employees. In *Service* (1933) Dodie Smith investigates the ways in which two families adjust to financial crisis and venture into new employment territories, discovering previously hidden talents. Cf. Elizabeth Baker, *Partnership* (London: Samuel French, 1921); Kate O'Brien, *Distinguished Villa* (London: Benn, 1926); Aimee and Philip Stuart, *Her Shop* (London: Benn, 1929) and *Nine Till Six* (London: French, 1930); Dodie Smith, *Service*, in *Famous Plays of 1932-33* (London: Gollancz, 1933).

¹⁰ Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), p. 66.

¹¹ As opposed to Delaney's and Jellicoe's plays - innovatively centred on women's experiences - the male-authored plays of the period continued to represent women as marginal characters, functioning as a mere support to the male hero. The dominant figure in these plays was constituted by the male breadwinner, head of the family, who 'expected access to a fulfilled sexuality in reality and a glamorous sexual life in fantasy life'. Cf. Michelene Wandor, *Look back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-war British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 4.

¹² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Gollancz, 1963), p. 68.

¹³ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁶ Rodney Lowe, 'Postwar Welfare', in *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, ed. by Paul Johnson (Longman, 1994), p. 366. Among the acts introduced in this period the most relevant for the purposes of this discussion were: The Family Provision Act (1966), The Matrimonial Homes Act (1967), The NHS Family Planning Act (1967), the long overdue Abortion Act (1967) and Sexual Offences Act (1967), The Maintenance Orders Act (1968), The Family Law Reform Act (1969), The Divorce Reform Act (1969), The Children and Young Persons Act (1969), The Equal Pay Act (1970). 1969 also saw the publication of the Seebohm report on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services, a document that facilitated the reorganisation of the social services allowing for the establishment of social service departments in all local authorities (1971).

¹⁷ Hester Eisentein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (London: Unwin, 1984), p. 69.

¹⁸ Cf. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1991).

¹⁹ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1979), p. 193.

²⁰ Firestone, p. 192.

²¹ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1970), p. 235.

²² Ibid., p. 236.

²³ Ibid., p. 174.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 320.

²⁵ Cf. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Allen Lane, 1974).

²⁶ Juliet Mitchell, 'Women - The Longest Revolution', *New Left Review* (November-December, 1966), pp. 36-37. Mitchell's preoccupations found fascinating dramatic reflection in Caryl Churchill's

1978 *Traps* and 1979 *Cloud Nine*. Cf. Churchill, *Traps* (London: Nick Hern, 1989) and *Cloud Nine* (London: Pluto Press; Joint Stock Theatre Group, 1980).

²⁷ Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1991)

²⁸ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (London: Virago, 1980), p. 216.

²⁹ Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper, 1991), p. 33.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 197.

³¹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 136-137.

³² Ibid., p. 165.

³³ Also confer Jungian work, such as Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, transl. by Ralph Manheim (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955); Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, transl. by Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1976); Nor Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections of the Archetypal Feminine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

³⁴ Kristeva, 'Interview with Elaine Hoffman Baruch on Feminism in the United States and France', in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. by Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 374.

³⁵ Cf. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 245 and 251.

³⁶ Chantal Chawaf, 'Linguistic Flesh', in *New French Feminisms*, pp. 177-178.

³⁷ Catherine Clément, 'The Guilty One', in Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, transl. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

³⁸ Cf. Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986b).

³⁹ Luce Irigaray, 'And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other', *Signs* (Autumn, 1981).

⁴⁰ Cf. Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980); Kristeva, *Tales of Love* (New York, Guilford: Columbia University Press, 1987a).

⁴¹ Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' - originally entitled *Hérétique de l'amour* - in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986a), a work partially drawing on Marina Warner's study, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976). Kristeva explains in an interview with Rosalind Coward that the split column of her essay is aimed to represent 'the wound or scar from which the theoretician writes' - in this case, with regard to the deep and painful involvement with maternity. Cf. 'Julia Kristeva in Conversation with Rosalind Coward', in *The Portable Kristeva*.

⁴² Sheila Kitzinger's other publications include the studies *Birth at Home* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); *The Place of Birth: A Study of Environment in which Birth Takes Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978b); *The Midwife Challenge* (London: Pandora, 1988); and the album *Being Born*, with the collaboration of the photographer Lennart Nilsson (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1986).

⁴³ Sheila Kitzinger, *Women as Mothers: How They See Themselves in Different Cultures* (Oxford: Martin Robertson with Fontana Books, 1978a), p. 35.

⁴⁴ Another important British author on the topic was Ann Oakley. Best known for her groundbreaking study on the sociology of housework, Oakley's books related to mothering and the circumstances of giving birth include mainly sociological and ethnographic/autobiographical titles, ranging from *Becoming a Mother* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979); *Women Confined: Towards a Sociology of Childbirth* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980); *From Here to Maternity: Becoming a Mother* (Penguin Harmondsworth, 1981); *Helpers in Childbirth: Midwives Today* (Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1990); *Social Support and Motherhood: the Natural History of a Research Project* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). Oakley's work was aimed at challenging the legitimacy of the over-medicalisation of childbirth on the grounds of women's basic human right to dignity and privacy.

⁴⁵ Kitzinger, 1978a, p. 145.

⁴⁶ 'It may take a long time for a woman to love her child when the beginning of her relationship with it has been interfered with by outsiders'. Cf. Kitzinger, 1978a, p. 184.

⁴⁷ According to statistics, induction rates had risen by 50% in British hospitals in the late sixties and seventies, although only about 10% of women needed to have labour induced. Episiotomies and

perineal shaves had become a common practice, without the women in question being consulted, and without the particular birth-case requiring it.

⁴⁸ Mr Brown: 'I didn't know we were to be the first test-tube parents - I wish we weren't!', in Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 167.

⁴⁹ Frozen IVF babies: babies born as a result of IVF technique (egg and semen fertilised outside the body) combined with freezing. In such a manner a delay can be introduced between the fertilisation of the egg and its implantation into the mother's body (following a process of thawing).

⁵⁰ In 1994 there were 69 clinics offering IVF treatment in the UK, leading to 19,189 cases of treatment, 4,417 pregnancies and 3,477 births. The live birth rate per cycle was 14%, while the cost of a treatment cycle varied between £700 to £2,500. Cf. Jane Pilcher, *Women in Contemporary Britain: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 97.

⁵¹ Mary Warnock, *A Question of Life: The Warnock Report on Human Fertilisation and Embryology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

⁵² This date was established because embryos start developing a nervous system afterwards, and hence it would be unethical to interfere with them after this period.

⁵³ In June 1999 Tessa Jowell, the minister for public health, reaffirmed the government's total opposition to the cloning of babies, as it would be 'ethically unacceptable'.

⁵⁴ Sarah Boseley, 'Cloning Brought to a Halt' and Tim Radford 'Forces that Put Cloning under a Shadow', *The Guardian* (25 June 1999).

⁵⁵ Despite the celebratory reception and innovative nature of this technique, it is crucial to mention that the use of frozen eggs carries a much lower success rate than conventional IVF, between 1% and 10% as opposed to 15-20% for regular IVF procedures (BBC Health website, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/health/newsid%5F618000/618236.stm>).

⁵⁶ Cf. Sarah Boseley, 'Ban on Births from Frozen Eggs Lifted', *The Guardian* (26 January 2000).

⁵⁷ Melissa Kite, 'Disabled MPs Plead for Cell Stem Research' *The Times* (16 December 2000).

⁵⁸ Robin McKie, 'Revealed: Medical Miracle Offers Hope of Perfect Health', *The Observer* (25 February, 2001).

⁵⁹ The Mastertons, in fact, approached a clinic in Rome in order to obtain pre-gender diagnosis, illegal in the UK. Upon finding out that Louise Masterton was carrying a male embryo, they decided to give it away as they wanted a daughter. Cf. Gerard Seenan, "'Designer Baby" Parents Give Away Embryo', *The Guardian* (5 March 2001).

⁶⁰ Anthony Browne and Robin McKie, 'We'll Have That One - It's Perfect: How Far Will the Genetic Manipulation of Embryos Go?', *The Observer* (8 October 2000).

⁶¹ Michelle Stanworth, 'Reproductive Technologies and the Deconstruction of Motherhood', in *Reproductive Technologies*, ed. by Michelle Stanworth (Cambridge: Polity Press).

⁶² Renate Duelli Klein, quoted in Juliette Zipper and Selma Sevenhuijsen 'Surrogacy: Feminist Notions of Motherhood Reconsidered', in Michelle Stanworth, ed., *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 136.

⁶³ Gena Corea, quoted by Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, 'Foetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction', in Stanworth, p. 77.

⁶⁴ Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli Klein and Shelley Minden, eds., *Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood?* (London: Pandora Press, 1984.)

⁶⁵ Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs* (London: The Women's Press, 1988).

⁶⁶ Ann Dally, *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal* (London: Burnett Books Ltd., 1982).

⁶⁷ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), p. 217.

⁶⁸ Sara Ruddick, 'Maternal Thought', in Joyce Trebilcot, ed., *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983), p. 227.

⁶⁹ Tuula Gordon, *Feminist Mothers* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 2.

⁷⁰ Trebilcot, p. 1.

⁷¹ Natasha Walter, 'What Feminism Offers Men', *The Independent* (28 June 1999).

⁷² bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre* (Boston: South End Press, 1985), p. 135.

⁷³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982). Gilligan's work was permeated by her attempt at avoiding an essentialising tone. However, what she succeeded in achieving was at best ambivalence, as at times she emphasised women's special ability to make choices in individual circumstances and

be preoccupied with the specific, while at other times she argued that the principle of 'different voice' that she introduced was not characterised by gender, but by theme. The opposition between 'male' and 'female' voices that she presented ought to be read according to this latter note as the distinction between two modes of thought, rather than seen as generalisations about either sex.

⁷⁴ Being childless, however, for radical feminists signified a threat to patriarchal order, as it automatically involved a transgression of the role traditionally defined for women.

⁷⁵ Lynn Segal, 'Women's Retreat into Motherhood: Back to the Nursery', *New Statesman*, 113., no. 2910. (2 January 1987), p. 2.

⁷⁶ Oakley, 1979, p. 308.

⁷⁷ Melissa Benn, *Madonna and Child: Towards a New Politics of Motherhood* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), p. 10.

⁷⁸ Julie Burchill, *The Guardian*, 23 July, 1996.

⁷⁹ Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 233 and 241.

⁸⁰ Julie Burchill, *Sex and Sensibility* (London: Grafton, 1992), pp. 199-204.

⁸¹ Campbell, 1987, p. 246.

⁸² The percentage of women returning to work within nine months after giving birth increased from twenty-five % to forty-five % in the course of the decade.

⁸³ Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York: Summit Books, 1981), pp. 333-334.

⁸⁴ Cf. Naomi Wolf's article 'The Motherhood Myth', *The Times Magazine* (24 March 2001). Wolf's book on motherhood is due to be published in late 2001.

⁸⁵ Natasha Walter, 'Meet the New Cherie, the Glowing, Radiant Darling of the Tory Press', *The Independent* (30 November 1999).

⁸⁶ Linda Kelsey, editor of *Cosmopolitan* and *She* magazines, quoted in Benn, p. 47.

⁸⁷ Erica Jong, 'I Am Having It All - So Why Do I Feel Terminally Exhausted?', *Cosmopolitan*, 1985, quoted in Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1991), p. 2.

⁸⁸ Maeve Haran, *Having It All*, jacket blurb, quoted in Benn, p. 48.

⁸⁹ Catherine Hakim, *Key Issues in Women's Work* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), p. 207.

⁹⁰ Benn, op. cit.

⁹¹ Anthony Giddens, *New Statesman* (10 January 1997).

⁹² Angela Yuval-Davis, quoted in Benn, pp. 150-151.

⁹³ Zoe Heller, 'Feminism Recanted - but at what Cost to Women?', review of Rosalind Coward's *Sacred Cows*, *Daily Telegraph* (3 July, 1999), p. 24.; Natasha Walter, 'What Feminism Offers Men', *The Independent*, *The Monday Review* (28 June 1999).

⁹⁴ Beatrix Campbell, in discussion with Rosalind Coward and Jenni Murray, 'Woman's Hour', Radio Four (7 July 1999).

⁹⁵ Cf. Maureen Freely's 'Nice Work if You Can Get It', *The Observer* (4 July 1999) on the tendency of career women in their mid-thirties giving up their jobs in order to have a baby and experience the pleasures of staying at home and raising one's child.

⁹⁶ Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 99-100.

⁹⁷ Benn, p. 234.

Chapter 2

Rethinking Motherhood: Instances of Proto-feminism in Fifties

Drama

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is aimed at mapping out a number of key stages in the thematic and stylistic diversity that characterised theatrical production in mid-fifties Britain. On the one hand, playwrights continued to utilise the conventions of commercial theatre yet move on to previously unexplored subjects; while on the other a new generation of authors emerged who radically changed style and introduced working-class experience into the realm of mainstream drama. From the array of women playwrights active in fifties British theatre, this analysis privileges a few representative cases. It intends to show that women playwrights predominantly focused on the family as a setting of their dramas in order to revisit received notions of family life and to investigate broader social and psychological issues.

In fact, these playwrights embarked on a fresh examination of women's roles, examinations that often led to a total subversion of mainstream ideology. Locating the family as a site for interpersonal exchange, the playwrights mainly scrutinised the issue of conflict between generations and focused on the figure of the mother. The three authors considered here investigated different perceptions of the fifties family as a structure of social organisation. They depicted extended families incorporating several generations and classes (Enid Bagnold), units led by single mothers (Shelagh Delaney), as well as alternative arrangements disconnected from marriage and direct bloodlines (Ann Jellicoe). The playwrights also presented parenthood in a variety of

manifestations. Conventional, harmonious motherhood was almost entirely absent, as a range of plays centred on women's resistance to give birth and nurture, attention being channelled instead to the phenomenon of surrogacy.

In terms of form, the playwrights emphasised opposing tendencies too: ranging from the inter-war tradition of bourgeois theatre (Bagnold) to the world of predominantly realist drama (Delaney) and experimentalism (Jellicoe). Enid Bagnold carried on the practices and conventions of West End theatre, yet in her content she sketched most of the subsequent preoccupations of new theatre with regard to sexual politics and class dynamics. Investigating the problem of surrogate parenting in her 1956 play, *The Chalk Garden*, she devised an alternative family that included three members of a female lineage as well as characters of both sexes belonging to different classes and social status. She problematised the taken-for-granted legitimacy of patriarchy - by challenging and subverting the rule of the male authority figure (the unseen butler) - through female creativity and intellect (as manifested by the protagonist Madrigal). Equally, she explored possibilities of female bonding across generations and social status, stressing the rivalries and difficulties in communication between women, a theme taken up two generations later by Charlotte Keatley (cf. Chapter 4). Although Bagnold wrote from within the English class system, she did not designate her characters' positions of power according to class hierarchies: it is a (male) butler who heads the household until challenged and overturned by a former convict, turned governess.

Unlike Bagnold, Shelagh Delaney rejected the conventions of drawing room drama in order to produce a play that was rooted in the immediate experience of working-class characters and audiences. *A Taste of Honey* (1958) also features an alternative family structure in opposition to a mother-daughter relationship. But

while Jo's and Geof's partnership works as a paradigm of mutual support and understanding - Geof welcoming Jo's future baby, though it is fathered by another man - the actual blood link between mother and daughter appears to be much more problematic. In a similar manner to Bagnold's play, biological bonds are presented as being unsatisfactory when not substantiated by genuine communication and trust. On the other hand, relationships developed as a result of reciprocity and shared interests tend to emerge as more viable in the long run. Delaney also asked extremely pertinent and for the time revolutionary questions with regard to women's traditional association with childbirth and nurture. She can be seen as intuitively forecasting some of the issues later developed by the Women's Liberation Movement and feminism. She presented both central female characters as theoretically dissociating motherhood from femaleness, yet she did not make them renounce parenting in a literal sense. Eventually - in spite of Jo's attempts at leading an entirely different life - she ends up replicating her mother: not only stylistically, through the play's music-hall undertone, but also via teenage pregnancy.

Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother* juxtaposes issues of power and authority with the mysterious and threatening facets of female fertility. Written in an experimental, seemingly chaotic style, the play attempts to enact the immediacy of 'incoherent people' in general, whilst exploring natural urges, impulses and emotions associated to the feminine. It does not aim at appealing to the intellect of the audience either, but rather to their senses and their capacity to empathise with the characters onstage. The protagonist's fertility and ability to give birth (as it happens, on stage) constitutes the major ground for audience support and secures her ultimate claim to authority above the other characters. Greta's maternity, however, is a symbolic rather than literal asset deployed in a sub-cultural context. Thus, it stands

for the possibilities inherent in the marginal female subject to move centre-stage (via authority), but it equally marks a route towards the cultivation of female essentialism (via the discovery of a separate mode of communication, available primarily for women). From the latter point of view, the play prefigures *écriture féminine*, owing not only to its non-linear timeframe, structured along the pace and rhythm of impulses, but also - crucially - to its unconditional celebration of the maternal function.

2.2 Transgression in the Drawing Room:

Surrogate Parenting in Enid Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden*

Although contemporary with the work of John Osborne, Enid Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden* (1956) deliberately ignores the historical, political or cultural climate of its time in order to revisit the well-tested shelter offered by the upper middle-class milieu.¹ The genre of drawing-room comedy had long constituted a route for success for Bagnold, representing continuity in a tradition going back several decades whilst also sketching some of the preoccupations of forthcoming feminist writers. By the early fifties Bagnold was an established novelist, poet and playwright,² with regular working contacts with the world of commercial theatre. But in spite of her previous success, Bagnold encountered similar difficulties to other women playwrights when she first approached theatre managements.

The *The Chalk Garden* is a particularly relevant case in this context, for it premiered in the United States as a result of the American theatre being 'more receptive to fresh work than the English'.³ Bagnold and her New York manager, Irene Selznik, worked together for over a year on the script, providing a number of

versions until they succeeded in putting on the play.⁴ Eventually, it opened on 26 October 1955 at the Barrymore Theater in New York, directed by George Cukor, with Gladys Cooper as Mrs St Maugham and Siobhan McKenna as Miss Madrigal.⁵ Starting from immediate positive reactions the play's success snowballed, achieving long-term acclaim on Broadway and Bagnold receiving the American Academy of Arts and Letters Silver Medal for distinguished achievement in drama.⁶ A *New York Times* reviewer described the play as a 'coruscating piece of work - witty in the literary tradition of Congreve':

the lines carefully polished, the observations of character shrewd and hard-headed, the portrait of an upper-class world intimate and objective. [...] There is a stimulating mind at work in *The Chalk Garden*. It is outrageous, subtle and detached. It is one of the keenest minds that have upset the complacency of Broadway for a long time.⁷

Though reworked⁸ and re-staged for the British premiere,⁹ the West End tone was equally appreciative and climaxed in Kenneth Tynan's classification: 'the finest artificial comedy to have flowed from an English (as opposed to an Irish) pen since the death of Congreve'.¹⁰

Bagnold's work directly continued the commercial success of productions acclaimed in the West End during the inter-war period and the early fifties. Unlike Bagnold's play, these works did not attempt to transgress the boundaries of the genre in which they were written. Nevertheless, reference to them needs to be made here, especially when taking account of Alison Light's observation that 'Feminist work must deal with the conservative as well as the radical imagination'.¹¹ Several playwrights of the time were also successful novelists, such as Agatha Christie, G.B. Stern or Enid Bagnold; and both Christie and Stern had adapted some of their own novels for the stage. Two major areas of scrutiny in these plays were the relationship between the mother and the daughter and/or the rest of the family, and secondly the relationships between women of different generations. Owing to its coverage of a

wide range of potential approaches to mothering, early to mid-twentieth century theatre

often exposed, sometimes affirmed, sometimes challenged, the relationship of motherhood to an idea or proposed ideal of femaleness, femininity and the family.¹²

By the 1920s the average size of middle-class families had become considerably reduced, initiating the move from the previous pattern of extended families to the mid-twentieth century nuclear family unit. Motherhood and the rearing of children became 'an end in itself, both emotionally and practically', inviting women 'deeper and deeper into a shadow world of feelings and suspected feelings, guilt, self-analysis, and every nuance of ambivalence'.¹³ Starting from the thirties, women increasingly found themselves scrutinised through the lens of an abundant body of social theories, the methods of mothering being laid out in scientific theorising. The most influential of these were based on Freudian psychoanalysis and the work of Freud's disciples, such as Melanie Klein, Helen Deutsch or Karen Horney.¹⁴ Despite the complexity of the debate, there were predominantly two complementary images that captured the popular imagination. According to the first position (based mainly on the work of Klein), if being a wife and a mother was not sufficient in terms of personal fulfilment for a woman, then she was manifesting symptoms of abnormality and was categorised as a 'bad' or 'rejecting' mother. In order to counterbalance this view, rooted in biological determinism, another strand stressed the relevance of cultural and emotional imperatives in the development of the female personality (Horney).

Though the playwrights of the twenties and thirties would not utilise a vocabulary informed by such theoretical premises, they were, according to Maggie B. -Gale, interested in dramatising 'the lived experience, which resulted from the *consequences* of changes within the public world'.¹⁵ Their representations were often

‘contradictory, multiple and many-sided’ as were the practices of mothering in real life, and consequently ‘a variety of images exist[ed] at the same time’.¹⁶ The two most frequently encountered categories of major female characters were, on the one hand, the women dissatisfied with the automatic association between mothering and femininity, and on the other the ones celebrating motherhood as a safeguard of family life. The overwhelming majority of these plays was set in middle-class environments, confined to the space of the drawing room, and written in the genre of domestic comedy or melodrama.

Focusing on the life of three generations in a wealthy Jewish family based in London, the actress and novelist G.B. Stern adapted her successful novel *Tents of Israel* for the stage under the title *The Matriarch* (1929).¹⁷ The novel, published in 1924, was followed by a number of sequels, the first three volumes of which were published as *The Rakonitz Chronicles* (1932). Equally successful, the play ran at the Royalty Theatre for more than two hundred performances with Mrs Patrick Campbell in the title role. The play investigated motherhood as both a cultural and biological experience, through the figure of the archetypal Jewish mother who controlled her children even after they reached adulthood. Eventually, however, the juxtaposition of the two parallel concerns - biological bonds and the idea of cultural specificity - led Stern to interrogate and challenge the validity of such imperatives.

The trope of the matriarch also appeared in Gertrude Jennings’s *Family Affairs* (1934)¹⁸ and Dodie Smith’s *Dear Octopus* (1938), both set in upper-middle class environments. Via her protagonist, Lady Madehurst, Jennings offered a romanticised view on family life, stressing that the maintenance of family ties was a woman’s most important moral task. Though willing to make occasional compromises for her children, Lady Madehurst firmly insists on them prioritising the

family unit in return, as does Dora Randolph, the heroine of *Dear Octopus*. Dora disapproves of her daughter Cynthia's career as a businesswoman, a venture that she perceives as a transgression against gender-role expectations. Smith's play is probably best known today for its extremely idealised picture of Englishness and upper-middle-class life and its argument for the indestructibility of the family unit: 'It bends, it stretches - but it never breaks'. As formulated by the title and reinforced throughout the play, the family - as 'a dear octopus from whose tentacles we never quite escape, nor, in our inmost hearts, ever quite wish to'¹⁹ - emerged for Smith as a treasured, but nevertheless feared, institution.

The idea of fear - only tangentially suggested by these matriarchal characters - was explored more fully in Clemence Dane's *Moonlight Is Silver* (1934),²⁰ in which the matriarch's efforts to maintain the family unit were so powerful that she almost broke up her son's marriage. Trying to legitimate the view that in order to fulfil her role a mother had to be not merely caring but also authoritarian and destructive if necessary, Dane's play functioned as an excellent illustration of the scientific debate on 'good' versus 'bad' mothering. As another opposite of the 'good' nurturing mother, the image of the 'refusing' mother was also present in a number of plays. Backed by the theoretical support of Melanie Klein's division between the 'ideal' nurturing versus the 'phallic' denying mother, the latter was embodied, for instance, in the character of Olivia Russell in Joan Morgan's *This Was a Woman* (1946).²¹ According to psychoanalytic theory, the 'phallic' mother's dominance is rooted in her reservations with regard to conventional femininity and in women's consistent confrontation with negative images about being a woman. As a way of surpassing these negative feelings she not only resists subservience but also develops characteristics traditionally associated with the masculine, such as control and

forcefulness, and transforms into a manipulative and overpowering figure that often imposes her own desires upon her children. Olivia, Morgan's neurotic and masculine anti-heroine, has indeed no access to a means of personal expression other than in her familial role. She is featured in an atmosphere of containment, suppression and social rigidity, complete with the resentment and manipulative practices of her version of 'phallic' motherhood.

Since motherhood outside marriage was practically unacceptable according to the morality of the time, the issue of single parents rarely occurred. It did appear, however, in Sylvia Rayman's *Women of Twilight* (1951) in which motherhood was examined not so much from a psychological but rather a socio-economic perspective. Rayman deliberately subverted the image of idealised Englishness and family life portrayed in plays like *Dear Octopus*, calling attention to the margins of society (the twilight zone) where the protagonist of the play lived. The producer, Rona Laurie, stressed in her preface to the published text how the play 'challenge[d] the social conscience of the audience'²² as it condemned the bourgeois attitude towards the poor in general and single mothers in particular. Mainly for this reason, *Women of Twilight* can be considered a landmark play in its investigation of women's experience as mothers, as well as for its investment of Laura, the single-mother protagonist, with the confidence to utter the lines: 'I don't want no man tied to me. All I want is my baby'.²³ Following this work, women playwrights increasingly approached the issue of mothering from angles uninformed by mainstream ideology. In this respect, Rayman's play can be viewed as a forerunner to the texts of the late fifties and sixties in providing an instance of dissenting motherhood.

Though written in this tradition, Bagnold's plays also share common ground with the emerging pre-feminist writers of the late fifties. Lib Taylor has classified

Bagnold's work as feminist/reflectionist, owing to her representation of women's experience, alongside her attempts at disrupting social and gender stereotypes and 'dislodging entrenched beliefs'.²⁴ Exclusively featuring upper middle-class households,²⁵ Bagnold's plays nevertheless engage with class relations via the employee (housemaid/butler/governess) versus the employer (mistress/master of the house) relationship. The power relations in these scenarios are not automatically negotiated along the class divide and social conventions are often disregarded, as the case of *The Chalk Garden* convincingly illustrates.

Set in Mrs St. Maugham's country house, *The Chalk Garden* focuses on an unusual private space, one that triggers the exploration of interpersonal relationships. As a traditionally female sphere, the indoor location acts as a supportive and familiar terrain for the women protagonists, but it also integrates the male characters. Unlike Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, where the men do not significantly influence the decisions of the female protagonists, in *The Chalk Garden* both the unseen butler and the judge act as decisive factors in the women's lives. Like Delaney, though, Bagnold set an unconventionally structured family at the centre of her play. It consists of Mrs St. Maugham, her granddaughter Laurel, and Laurel's governess, Miss Madrigal. Laurel's actual mother, Olivia - who is initially presented as uncaring, and who separated from her daughter in order to remarry - is absent most of the time and only appears towards the very end. Therefore, the mother function is distributed between a number of characters: Mrs St Maugham; a manservant called Maitland; but above all Miss Madrigal, who can be considered as the emblematic surrogate mother. She identifies Laurel with her own childhood self ('I had met myself again. The cobwebs and the fantasies. The same evasions') and she claims to be the embodiment of the ideal carer: 'The child needs me'.²⁶

In *The Chalk Garden* everybody's actions, Madrigal's excepted, are symbolically supervised by an unseen man, the disabled butler Pinkbell. He is the authority figure, unconditionally accepted by Mrs St. Maugham, but finally challenged by the newcomer Madrigal. Pinkbell's authoritarian regime, 'like any patriarchal system, pervasive and invisible',²⁷ appears strikingly obsolete and inefficient to Madrigal. Her gradual introduction of new working methods to take care of the garden are all steps towards Pinkbell's elimination, and his death in the final section of the play marks her victory. At the end she and Mrs St. Maugham are seen attending to the garden together - trying to make it fertile. From this stage onwards, 'maternal order is the natural order'²⁸ in the chalk garden.

However, the chalk garden in the title refers not merely to Mrs St. Maugham's actual garden but also to Laurel, ignored by her (biological) mother, neglected by her grandmother and desperately longing for attention and support. Bagnold suggests that without some enthusiastic caring intervention, neither the garden nor the girl can develop normally:

MRS ST MAUGHAM: [...] The child's a flower. She grows in liberty!
MADRIGAL: Weeds grow as easily.²⁹

Although Bagnold warns against inadequate nurturing as both garden and girl have failed to live up to expectations because of neglect, she denied any deliberate symbolism in the play:

The equation of *The Chalk Garden* with dryness of the heart did not occur to me. [...] I see now that it is a reasonable interpretation but I was not consciously working out a parallel as I wrote. I had simply conceived Mrs St Maugham as making a muddle of everything, her garden and her grand-daughter.³⁰

Crucially, however, Bagnold shifts the responsibility for this inadequate care from the 'bad mother' (Mrs St Maugham and Olivia) to the patriarchal regime and Pinkbell. Pinkbell is the decision-maker in all aspects of life; the household is exclusively governed by the standards and regulations imposed by him. Only after

Madrigal challenges his authority and manages to introduce her own methods can the garden and Laurel suddenly flourish. Madrigal proves that besides technical expertise one must rely on affection and creativity in order to succeed as a carer. Yet Madrigal herself does not actually conform to any stereotype of the ideal nurturer. She is a middle-aged unattached woman, with no children of her own, who has never attended to anyone else previously.

In order to embody the strength of the nurturing function, Bagnold creates a powerful character with a strong will, able to face and confront opposition. She also imagines someone with a vast and uncommon personal experience, considerably removed from the average middle-class woman's. Madrigal has encountered both the utmost exposure in the public sphere (through her trial for murder) and total isolation and claustrophobia (in prison), before experiencing a certain sense of refuge in Mrs St Maugham's home. Refusing to sentimentalise her as a soft and compromising 'angel of the house', Bagnold makes a case for the possibility of experimenting with gender roles and stereotypes. She indicates that one needs neither to be a biological mother to nurture, nor a stay-at-home housewife to be able to meet the needs of a child. At the end of the play, nevertheless, Laurel is re-claimed by her mother. Laying the blame for her inadequate performance as a mother on her own lack of a satisfactory relationship with Mrs St Maugham, Olivia emerges as a woman matured by her experiences:

OLIVIA: [...] Things come late to me. Love came late to me. Laurel was born in a strange virginity. To have a child doesn't always make a mother.³¹

As she pleads her suitability for the role of the perfect carer, she confronts her mother's desperate attempt to keep Laurel, labelling it a compensatory exercise for their own failed mother-daughter bond:

MRS ST MAUGHAM: [...] Laurel came to me of her own free will - and I have turned my old age into a nursery for her.

OLIVIA: And God has given you a second chance to mother.³²

In spite of Laurel's reservations, this reclamation and the championing of direct biological bonds is supported by Madrigal, despite the fact that in this way she undermines her own legitimacy as a surrogate mother.

MRS ST MAUGHAM: This girl of special soil! Transplant her?

MADRIGAL: You have not a green thumb, Mrs St Maugham, with a plant or a girl. This is a house where nothing good can be made for her.³³

As a result, however, her relationship with Mrs St. Maugham intensifies. Lacking an object of nurture and attention, the two women develop a mutually caring relationship of a new kind: Madrigal teaches Mrs St. Maugham gardening (and by extension, nurturing skills), while Mrs St. Maugham renegotiates the class division between them. United, the two women will be able to overcome any former failure on the terrain of communication and successfully carry out their joint project.

MADRIGAL: But if I stay with you - and we work together - with potash - and a little granular peat - we can *make* it do so.³⁴

As for the male characters' caring capacities, Bagnold offers less versatile options despite mapping out two contradictory trends. She makes an attempt via the manservant, Maitland, to present genuine concern (she details for instance, the intimate terms on which he negotiates his relationship with Laurel), yet she presents this only as a side-story, overshadowed by the women's intricate bonds. Her presentation of Pinkbell shows men simply exercising control and rigid authority, without any genuine desire or potential for interpersonal and inter-gender communication. Thus, she predominantly maintains the 'division of labour' between the sexes as far as the practice of nurture is concerned. She ascribes it to the female realm, in spite of the significant alterations she introduces to the actual stereotype of this ideal carer.

Following the American success, the British production opened in Birmingham on 21 March 1956 before transferring to the Theatre Royal, Haymarket on 11 April. Directed by Sir John Gielgud, *Madrigal* was played by Peggy Ashcroft and Mrs St Maugham by Dame Edith Evans, whose performance connoted, according to Tynan's review, 'a crested wave of Edwardian eccentricity vainly dashing itself on the rocks of contemporary life'.³⁵ Through this performance, Tynan claimed, West End theatre had justified its otherwise anachronistic existence. Tynan equally stressed, however, that this production of *The Chalk Garden* 'mark[ed] the end of an era; Miss Stott's [Laurel's] farewell to Dame Edith Evans, as irrevocable as Nora's departure in *A Doll's House*, represent[ed] the future taking leave of the past'.³⁶ He noted the extraordinary professionalism of the production ('wilfully preserving a formal, patrician acting style', 'a display of theatrical equitation') alongside its artistic subtlety, concluding with a parallel between the actors' perfection and 'the spirited elegance of a Mozart quintet'.³⁷ Owing to its ornamental and witty metaphors and similes, the sharpness of its dialogue and its occasional moments of genuine candour, Bagnold's play is indeed a *tour de force* for those who take delight in the sparkling potential of language.

After almost two decades of silence, *The Chalk Garden* was revived professionally in 1971 (at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, again with Gladys Cooper as Mrs St Maugham) and in 1992. The play received positive reviews on both occasions, from J.C Trewin's acclaim - 'One of the century's genuine claims to posterity'³⁸ - to praise for its fine craftsmanship and innovativeness:

It is a mordant, beautifully written and rather subversive treatment of the stock Loamshire comedy of sunny mornings and French windows, every alternate well-honed line a morbid crack for funeral jest.³⁹

Setting the play in the broader context of literary and theatre history, Charles Spencer contended:

The Chalk Garden is an exotic bloom from the 1950s which miraculously retains its freshness more than 35 years after its premiere. When it opened [...] Tynan hailed it as perhaps “the finest [English] artificial comedy [...] since Congreve”. But less than a month later, John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* arrived, and elegant, well-made drawing-room plays were supposedly consigned to the dustbin of theatrical history. Yet it is Osborne’s drama which now seems strident, sentimental and old-fashioned.⁴⁰

2.3 Desire and Repulsion:

The Ambivalence of Parenting in Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey*

Shelagh Delaney’s debut play, *A Taste of Honey*, was instantly recognised as a promising work by a potentially major talent. It was staged by Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop at Stratford East,⁴¹ and has subsequently been identified as a pre-feminist classic. For example, Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones singled out the year of its first production (1958) as the symbolic start for their investigation of post-war British drama, on the grounds that Delaney’s play initiated a ‘new way forward for women’s theatre’.⁴² In Raymond Williams’ view it was *A Taste of Honey* rather than *Look Back in Anger* that became representative for the new British theatre, owing to its synthesis of ‘general restlessness, disorganisation and frustration’.⁴³ A similar claim has also been made by Dominic Shellard, who contended that despite the fact that *A Taste of Honey* ‘reached the stage later’ than *Look Back in Anger*, it ‘has an equal, if not greater, claim to be a break point of the British theatre’.⁴⁴ Susan Bennett has argued that Delaney - like Jellicoe in *The Sport of My Mad Mother* - pushed the boundaries of social realism considerably further than Osborne; and yet both stand ‘as far as the (theatre) histories go, in the shadow of Jimmy Porter’s legendary presence’.⁴⁵

— In a 1959 review, T.C. Worsley classified *A Taste of Honey* as a play “‘about” a tart, a black boy giving a white girl a baby, a queer. The whole

contemporary lot, in short'.⁴⁶ Though ironic and dismissive, this synopsis highlighted most of Delaney's themes, whilst also suggesting the innovative nature of her approach and her preoccupation with issues of her own time. Other critics tended to emphasise Delaney's investigation of rootlessness and dislocation, central to so much cultural production of the fifties, as well as her analysis of class relations. The crucial issue in this respect about *Helen and Jo* is that they are socially marginal, whilst Geof is marginalised through his taboo-laden sexuality.⁴⁷ By choosing to focus on characters situated at the boundaries of social and sexual categories, Delaney investigates the question of 'otherness' in a variety of contexts. She not only constructs her female protagonists as 'other' - Jo, rebellious against the conventions of femininity; Helen, at the upper tolerance-limit of moral standards - but also her more sympathetic male characters: Geof experiments with homosexuality, while Jimmy represents blackness.

Delaney carries out her scrutiny within a realist setting that evokes a genuine feel for Northern working-class life, based to a large extent on her experience. Apart from being a 'real escape from the middlebrow, middle-class vacuum of the West End', the play was also 'real, contemporary poetry', and was about a world the audience knew and about a world filtered through the imagination of a sensitive young author.⁴⁸ Delaney posited her intention to 'write as people speak' and to present North Country people as 'very alive and cynical', as opposed to the conventionally constructed image of 'gormlessness'.⁴⁹ Despite highlighting social inequalities, Delaney was not concerned with contesting social structures; she concentrated rather on the subversion of traditional gender roles and expectations. In Lindsay Anderson's reading, Jo is 'tough' and has

A common-sense and Lancashire working-class resilience that will always pull her through. And this makes her different from the middle-class angry young man, the egocentric rebel. Josephine is not a rebel; she is a revolutionary.⁵⁰

Predominantly centred on Jo, the play offers an insight into the disintegrating family life of a mother and daughter in the Salford slums. Though forced by poverty to live in the same flat and indeed share the same bed, Helen and Jo in fact inhabit different imaginary worlds. The lack of actual communication between Helen and Jo, rooted partly in their different expectations from life but mainly in the generation gap between them, is addressed by Helen in one of her opening remarks:

HELEN: You bring them up and they turn round and talk to you like that. I would never have dared to talk to my mother like that when I was her age. She'd have knocked me into the middle of next week.⁵¹

Jo's youth - which subsequently generated extensive appreciation for the play - was a factor that constituted problems from the point of view of the censor who demanded that Jo should be clearly portrayed as over sixteen, and hence legally entitled to marry and become a mother. Following Jimmy Porter, the anti-hero of *Look Back in Anger*, who was hailed as 'the spokesman for the younger post-war generation, which looks at the world and finds nothing right with it',⁵² youth became a metaphor for the need for social change and for the legitimisation of contemporary experience.⁵³ Peter Lewis talked about the emergence of a 'youthquake' during the mid-fifties,⁵⁴ while T.C. Worsley expanded upon the term 'contemporary' as utilised by Jo:⁵⁵ 'Contemporary' is 'life as it is lived at this very moment'.⁵⁶ 'Contemporary' became a synonym for social criticism, 'a banner behind which the oppositional forces in the theatre could (temporarily) gather'.⁵⁷

Despite the fact that she does not consider Jo an adult yet, Helen's plans for the future exclusively concentrate on herself. Regretting having spoilt her life by giving birth to Jo as a result of a brief relationship with a man of weak intellect, Helen seems to be only concerned with finding an opportunity to leave her

background (including Jo) behind, whilst having as much fun as possible. Delaney describes Helen as a 'semi-whore' who makes no efforts to conceal that having an almost grown-up daughter is a burden - not merely because she had never really wanted to have her, but also because Jo's presence jeopardises her finding a partner. Not only does Helen completely lack domestic abilities, but she is also frank and ironic about the fact that she never aspired to be a good mother:

JO: You should prepare my meals like a proper mother.

HELEN: Have I ever laid claim to being a proper mother?⁵⁸

Though 'unsentimental and abrasive',⁵⁹ the relationship between Helen and Jo is arguably the strongest interpersonal connection in the play. While usually contradicting each other, Helen and Jo cannot avoid relating to one another and, in most cases, Jo actually re-enacts Helen's past. Jo is not always aware that her actions are a direct parallel to Helen's; in fact, she resists any suggestions of similarities and insists on her 'uniqueness'. Nevertheless, the Helen-Jo encounters can be read as double-acts in a music-hall routine,⁶⁰ Jo consistently picking up on Helen's cues and more or less directly responding to them throughout the play. Jo's replication of Helen is especially ironic in the light of her desire for difference; and thus, despite the play's realist setting, none of the protagonists' claims are to be taken (entirely) literally.

In spite of the fact that the play is set in a realistic domestic environment, neither woman performs any routine housework. One role of this environment, nevertheless, is to mediate in problematic interactions between the characters;⁶¹ and, at least on some occasions, the kitchen becomes an emblem for the tentative bond between mother and daughter. For instance, after having just moved into their new flat, Jo is making coffee - the only item that is prepared in their kitchen - for Helen who has caught a cold. This gesture symbolises a reversal of relationships between

mother and daughter: Jo is getting closer to a vaguely nurturing role. The genuine embodiment of caring, however, is Geof, whose appearance in the play coincides with Jo's financial independence and move away to a flat of her own. Although it is Geof who as a sort of surrogate parent will almost automatically assume the responsibility of attending to Jo during her pregnancy and prepares for the arrival of her baby, their relationship starts with Jo offering him shelter. The repeated dislocations and subversions of the traditional pattern of caring in Delaney's play contributed to its reputation as a crucial intervention in the negotiation of sexual politics in the late fifties. Basically, none of the characters correspond to the stereotypical behaviour patterns that either commercial theatre or mainstream social conventions had been propagating. Apart from Peter (Helen's short-term husband) who despite being something of a caricature still conforms more or less to the standards of white, heterosexual maleness, all the others are deviant in that they reconfigure norms and expectations concerning gender roles.

Although Delaney offers a sympathetic portrait of the closet homosexual Geof, she also presents sexuality as a problem, as an issue that makes one's life more complicated. Helen's flamboyant sexual activity has only caused her trouble: an unwanted baby at a very young age and another ruined marriage to Peter, by the end of the play. But for Jo sexual experience is not even associated with pleasure; rather it is treated as an ambiguous phenomenon.⁶² For instance, when the boy tries to kiss her, the following dialogue takes place:

JO: Don't do that.

BOY: Why?

JO: I like it.⁶³

Though designed as a comic routine, this dialogue also helps to articulate Jo's reservations towards sexual matters. Her response to the sailor boy's courting is

rooted in curiosity but also in loneliness. Delaney does not present either Helen or Jo as primarily 'hedonists' or 'bad women'. In spite of the fact that their lifestyles transgress social conventions, their consistency, as well as their lack of outrage at each other's behaviour, 'normalises' their world even for the middle-class spectator'.⁶⁴

The relationship that operates the most smoothly and is based on common interests is that between Jo and Geof. This is a relationship that eliminates any sexual element: 'I always want to have you with me, because I know you'll never ask anything from me'.⁶⁵ In fact, difficulties only arise when the issue of sex is raised. Jo claims to be 'sick of love'⁶⁶ and not to enjoy 'all this panting and grunting'.⁶⁷ However, while holding Geoff's hand, she recalls a painful and repressed childhood episode:

JO: I used to try and hold my mother's hands, but she always used to pull them away from me. [...] She had so much love for everyone else, but not for me.⁶⁸

This ambivalence between repulsion and desire goes hand in hand with her previously mentioned ambiguity about sexuality. Jo is prepared to neither get emotionally involved, nor to exploit the sheer physical pleasure of sex as her mother does; yet her curiosity and her attempts at replicating Helen make her unable to resist temptation altogether. In fact, Jo is desperate for genuine affection but is unable to offer or receive it, mainly due to the lack of emotional support she received as a child. Thus, for instance, when Geof gets her a doll on which to practise baby-care, she immediately bursts out in anger and smashes it:

JO: I'll bash its brains out. I'll kill it. I don't want this baby, Geof. I don't want to be a mother. I don't want to be a woman.⁶⁹

Written prior to the emergence of second-wave feminism and in a style antithetical to theorising, Delaney's play nevertheless anticipates the crux of Nancy

Chodorow's argument.⁷⁰ According to Chodorow, the lack of maternal attention and the absence of an adequate role model for a daughter, are likely to lead to a lack of desire to mother when the girl reaches adulthood. Jo's manifesto-like claim, 'I hate babies',⁷¹ is a rebellion against the unavoidable nature of motherhood and against biological destiny. She is positive that she does not want to follow in her mother's footsteps, yet she is unable to find another feasible option. The realisation that female destiny is thrust on her, with or without her will, triggers her deepest fears, conveyed most convincingly when she talks about breast-feeding: 'I'm not having a little animal nibbling away at me, it's cannibalistic. Like being eaten alive'.⁷² Due to a chain of associations (the doll Geof brought is white - the wrong colour), it is the doll scene that explores Jo's encounter with the sailor the most thoroughly. This is the first time she actually reveals his name, Jimmy, and admits that the likelihood of his coming back is almost nil.

Despite the fact that the relationship between Jo and Jimmy is sexual while that between Jo and Geof is based on mutual affection, Geof and Jimmy do not represent opposing poles. As Terry Lovell argues, there are many correspondences between them, rooted in their 'possession of stereotypically feminine characteristics'.⁷³ Although Geof is the uncontested caring figure, Jimmy also indicates an interest in domesticity. He is the ship's cook and was a nurse before his service in the navy. The film version adds to this when Jimmy takes Jo on board to take a bath and for him to dress her knee, and it shows him sitting on deck, chopping vegetables, as the ship moves away. Jimmy emerges as a surrogate parent to Jo, not just a lover, and he also figures as a fellow child who - especially in the film - is pictured playing with Jo.

Geof refuses to address his sexuality when asked to do so by Jo and threatens to move out rather than reveal his sexual preference.⁷⁴ At a time when the Lord Chamberlain's office would censor any direct reference to non-heterosexual identity, the character of Geof simply could not be constructed as openly gay. In other words, it was Littlewood's directorial caution not to contravene the above regulation that, in fact, led to Geof's reluctance to explain his sexuality. Jo, nevertheless, singles him out as different - 'I've always wanted to know about people like you'⁷⁵ - and Geof himself admits that he 'can't stand women at times'.⁷⁶ Geof also embarrasses Jo, when she is already heavily pregnant. Out of sheer affection rather than sexual desire, Geof offers to be the father of Jo's baby and tries to kiss her. Jo, taken by surprise, rejects this physical approach very firmly, contending that Geof is 'like a big sister'⁷⁷ to her: 'It comes natural to you [...] you'd make somebody a wonderful wife'.⁷⁸ According to Stephen Lacey happiness can only be found in a 'family' that is

Constituted on a different basis to that of the traditional family, one which breaks all the rules, and in which the central role, that of the mother, is detached from the biological mother and becomes a subject of negotiation.⁷⁹

Under these conditions, both Jo and Geof have access to 'mothering' at various stages in the play, while Helen is offered the chance to reject or subvert it. For Michelene Wandor, in 1987, the play's major merit was that it identified - perhaps for the first time - the problem that 'motherhood [was] thrust upon some women, and some men [were] denied the chance to nurture'.⁸⁰

In the final scene, however, mother and daughter find themselves united again, having eliminated their men and their aspirations. Though initially annoyed by Helen's presence, Jo welcomes her mother back:

JO: For the first time in my life I really feel important. I feel as though I could take care of the whole world. I even feel as though I could take care of you, too!⁸¹

By bringing the Helen-Jo relationship to the fore again, Delaney completes the circle and returns to the starting point of the play: mother and daughter confined to a claustrophobic domestic space. This reunion has been interpreted in multiple ways in order to fit both conservative and subversive arguments: ranging from an emphasis on Delaney's reinforcement of women's biological destinies as mothers to the acknowledgement of her genuine critique of sexual politics.

On the one hand, the two women appear to unite in order to assume, assist and affirm the biological role as a female and mother; motherhood thus emerges as the 'natural' option for women, in spite of the previous attempts at challenging its supremacy. In fact, neither Helen nor Jo has any serious alternative to the stereotype enclosed in conventional femininity - a term basically synonymous with femaleness for Delaney - and motherhood.⁸² Motherhood feels possible for Jo only when her own mother is present; consequently, the bringing together of the two women to undertake the responsibility of mothering stands for the failure of either Helen's or Jo's dreams of breaking through social conventions and signals the triumph of 'old values, however dislocated'.⁸³ In John Hill's interpretation, 'What reunites mother and daughter is the repetitive cycle whereby Jo has, in effect, lived through the errors of the parent', in 'a resigned acknowledgement of things as they are'.⁸⁴

On the other hand, Jo remains abandoned onstage, as Helen leaves for a drink after hearing about the baby's father. Thus, one can identify yet another break in the mother-daughter relationship between Helen and Jo, suggesting Helen's ultimate inability to assume her maternal role. Even her return to Jo has not really been a desire to prioritise the harmony of the mother-daughter unit; Helen appears to need Jo more than Jo needs her mother. Eventually, however, nothing is settled irreversibly and the ending is ambivalent. At this climactic point Helen poses the

question: 'I ask you, what would you do?'⁸⁵ Depending on the performer, this is a mere rhetorical statement rooted in (self)-ironic inertia or an actual interrogation of the audience. (In Joan Littlewood's production *Avis Bunnage* addressed the question, music-hall style,⁸⁶ directly to the audience).

Joan Littlewood's style of direction encouraged a sort of almost magic, larger than life realism; massively incorporating elements of music-hall technique, pantomime or caricature. The Theatre Workshop performances eliminated almost any trace of sentimentalism or Stanislavskyan 'identification' for the sake of a Brechtian epic theatre of demonstration. Following the 1956 visit to London of the Berliner Ensemble the acting style of British experimental theatre found itself marked by a solid Brechtian impact for decades to come, Theatre Workshop being perhaps the most ardent follower of this approach to performance. Among the many relevant productions, Littlewood played and directed *Mother Courage* in its UK premiere - at the insistence of Brecht's family - thus carrying a step forward the mutual influence between the Brechtian and British experimental acting traditions.

Like *The Chalk Garden*, *A Taste of Honey* is also frequently mentioned as a pre-feminist text. Sue-Ellen Case argues in relation to the ending of the play that its lyrical suspension corresponds to Delaney's own isolation as a young woman playwright writing before the emergence of an adequate context, that of second-wave feminism.⁸⁷ The play has been categorised by Lib Taylor as a 'feminine/reflectionist' piece,⁸⁸ owing to its emphasis on women characters and on the female condition. This label, however, is intended to describe mainly declarative texts that do engage with the situation and experience of women, focus on their emotional life, yet fail to challenge the dominant ideology significantly. Helen and Jo avoid conforming to the role of traditional homemakers and identify mothering as a burden, not a source of

joy or fulfilment. Jo willingly accepts the domestic support of Geof, removing care from the exclusive terrain of women. Both Jo and Helen make significant attempts at subverting social expectations concerning mothering and femininity,⁸⁹ even if they are eventually forced to confront the perpetuation of motherhood as a woman's realm.

The film version,⁹⁰ produced in 1961, was directed by one of the key figures of the New Wave in British Cinema, Tony Richardson.⁹¹ Though Delaney's original script contained realist elements, it was in the cinema that *A Taste of Honey* gained a coherent expression in working class realism. As a film, *A Taste of Honey* lost the music-hall quality imprinted by Littlewood, much of its bitter and often self-reflexive irony and the harshness of its initial challenges to sexual politics.⁹² Though assisted by Delaney herself, Richardson's adaptation included changes and additional scenes to the original script.⁹³ The film emphasises the geographical and social context of Helen's and Jo's flats and presents surrounding streets to highlight the industrial wasteland and shows a glimpse of the sailor's ship. Creating a powerful sense of space, Walter Lassally's camerawork collates the claustrophobia of the urban landscapes with the liberating scenes shot in the open air. Apart from intensifying the realist effect, such scenes also 'aestheticise' reality by investing a mundane setting with picturesque qualities. In some instances (sexual encounters, for example), the film transposes settings from indoors to outdoors - a device interpreted by Lovell as a signal of 'the transition from childhood'.⁹⁴ Jo tells Geof about her pregnancy during one of their walks, suggesting that Jo's pregnancy is a natural phenomenon. However, this sequence is introduced by a shot showing Jo framed under an arch, an image that also stands as 'a metaphor of entrapment, the arch containing and constraining Jo as her pregnancy is about to do'.⁹⁵

But, it is the ending that departs the most from Delaney's original. The play unites the two women, in a situation that recalls the very beginning of the plot. Delaney leaves it unspecified, in fact, whether Helen will return from the pub after the shock of having found out about the potential colour of Jo's baby. The film also features Helen's shock but it carries on to show in parallel the abandoned Jo, Helen who has just left for a drink and Geof, recently thrown out of the house by Helen. The central image is a bonfire built by the neighbouring children, while the camera shifts from one character to another, conveying the perspectives of both Geof - watching the scene from his hiding place - and of Jo - being watched yet unaware of Geof's affectionate gaze. There is a suggestion of Geof's attempt to reach out to Jo again, but this is suddenly interrupted by Helen's return. The final shot is a close-up of Jo staring into the fire and lighting a sparkler with the children, a symbolic gesture of clinging on to her childhood in spite of being doomed to become a mother.

In spite of high expectations, Delaney did not produce further successes for the stage. Her second play, *The Lion in Love* (1960),⁹⁶ achieved only a moderate run and Delaney moved on to film-script writing. From the perspective of forthcoming women playwrights, however, the emergence of Jo as a young female protagonist, alongside Delaney's focus on women's experience, had the significance of a breakthrough. The film version, similarly, introduced new expectations owing to its two women protagonists - acknowledged as a key contribution within the somewhat misogynistic context of New Wave cinema. Jo appears as a subject throughout and almost never as an object of male gaze and desire. In her relationships with the male characters Jo never has to face inequality because of her class or gender. Her social status is not significantly affected by mothering an illegitimate child either, after all Helen was a single parent, as well. Although Helen advises Jo not to make the same

mistakes she has made, her parental difficulties are associated to other aspects resulting from Jo's nonconformity: Geof's suspected homosexuality and the baby's colour.⁹⁷

The mere presence of Geof, in fact, acts as a taboo-breaking device: for his vaguely contoured yet obvious homosexuality on the one hand, and for his 'unmanly' inclination towards caring, on the other. Geof's resistance to the assumption of the so-called conventional emblem of masculinity (sexually potent and domineering) recalls the identity crisis of Jimmy and Cliff in *Look Back in Anger*. In Geof's case, though, sexual ambivalence as well as the desire to nurture, are the results of his personal choice and will; in other words, he is successful in finding a way out of the crisis via his positive appropriation of 'otherness'. As far as the attitude to pregnancy is concerned, *A Taste of Honey* depicts it as an actual, real issue, with direct relevance to the protagonist's future as a woman and a human being. Despite Delaney's problematising pregnancy and future motherhood, she does not denigrate them. She draws up an ambivalent image: on the one hand implying the constraining nature of motherhood as a repetitive cycle; but on the other suggesting a possibility for celebrating birth in connection with female bonding and the affirmation of women as independent sexual beings.

2.4 *The Sport of My Mad Mother:*

Mothering as Empowerment in the Experimental Theatre of Ann Jellicoe

Delaney's treatment of space and time were less naïve than critics originally supposed. Covering a linear time span slightly over the nine months gestation period, *A Taste of Honey* establishes a set of correspondences between Jo's and Heler's

lives. Jo replicates Helen's mistakes: incomplete education, unstable sexual relationships and teenage pregnancy - thus illustrating a sense of anti-chronological, 'monumental' temporality inhabited by women.⁹⁸ Delaney investigates the operation of a rhythmic and cyclical sense of time, proto-chronically announcing a version of Kristeva's 'woman's time': a concept forecast or revisited by most playwrights discussed in this thesis. Jo, like Helen, learns instantly to cope with her pregnancy⁹⁹ and adjusts her life accordingly, while her frustration finds its only expression through outbursts of rage and violence. Violence and rage are central features of Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (1958) too; a play exclusively set in a 'monumental' timeframe. Located in a quasi-mythic, primitive environment, this play privileges the somatisation of emotions, whilst intending to establish an immediate - intellectually unmediated - mode of communication between the characters onstage and the audience.

In contrast to Bagnold's and Delaney's work, it can be argued that Jellicoe's revolutionised theatrical form, even though *The Sport of My Mad Mother* has not received sufficient critical attention. Jellicoe was interested in the recording of feelings rather than their description, attempting to 'releas[e] emotions' both in characters and audiences, as well as to 'assault the tyranny of intellectual discourse'.¹⁰⁰ The play's focus on 'embodiment and non-verbal performance'¹⁰¹ has been pointed out, though, as well as its indebtedness to Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic reading of motherhood. Owing to its celebratory approach to motherhood, its evocation of a mythical female figure and its subversion of conventional gender role patterns, *The Sport of My Mad Mother* constitutes a successful anticipation of feminist theatre. Feminist dramatic criticism has identified in Jellicoe's play an *avant la lettre* application of 'writing the body' for the theatre:

mainly due to the play's non-linear plot-structure, the use of language to render emotions rather than facts, and the utilisation of music and rhythm to dictate pace. Investigated by a number of French feminist scholars, the concept of 'writing the body' has dominated the feminist theoretical scene of the 1970s. Chantal Chawaf argued in 1976 for the articulation of the body as an ultimate goal of writing. Utilising terms such as 'linguistic flesh' or 'corporeality of language' she emphasised the need to 'disintellectualize writing' and to explore its 'sensual' potential.¹⁰² In the same year, Hélène Cixous posited *écriture féminine* not only as a form of writing inspired by the body but also connected to the maternal;¹⁰³ hence reiterating correspondences between Jellicoe's theatre and writing - her protagonist's self-expression via giving birth and communicating in a non-articulate manner - and French feminist thought. Jellicoe, however, refused to theoretically interpret or define feminism, suggesting that definitions were for academics.¹⁰⁴

Jellicoe's theatre 'is a medium which works upon people's imagination and emotion - not merely their intellect', addressed to people 'driven by their emotions, by their fears and insecurities'.¹⁰⁵ Unlike her subsequent community plays - where she considered herself 'totally a craftsperson' who enjoyed 'delivering the goods as skilfully' as possible - *The Sport of My Mad Mother* was written 'intuitively, sensing along', 'with eyes closed'.¹⁰⁶ The play is an abstract piece, creating the impression of a set of notes, temporarily jotted down, which later would have to be developed into a more comprehensible text. In fact, John Russell Taylor claimed at the time that the script 'makes very little sense just read cold'. He added that it must have been intended as an *aide-mémoire* to the director in the 'transference of her initial conception from the stage of her own mind to a real, physical stage'.¹⁰⁷ As Jellicoe herself argued in the preface to the 1964 edition, the play was

not written intellectually according to a pre-arranged plan. It was shaped bit by bit until the bits felt right in relation to each other and to the whole. It is an anti-intellect play, not only because it is about irrational forces and urges, but because one hopes it will reach the audience directly through rhythm, noise and music and their reaction to basic stimuli.¹⁰⁸

Jellicoe also made it very clear from the very beginning that her play was 'a new kind of play' which demanded 'a new approach'.¹⁰⁹

Her intention was to offer an insight into the lives of incoherent people, who felt insecure and afraid, without even realising it or being aware of the reasons, and who compensated for their frustrations by directing their violence against someone else, often in an equally problematic condition. However, instead of explaining the details of the plot, Jellicoe aimed at showing events to the audience directly, discouraging them from concentrating on analysis and a search for meaning. In a way that recalls the aesthetics of the Artaudian 'Theatre of Cruelty', Jellicoe expressed a 'deep suspicion of theatre which intended to work primarily through verbalisation - through 'lines' (or 'the word')'.¹¹⁰ As Artaud claimed in his groundbreaking manifesto with regard to the language of theatre:

It runs through our sensibility. It aims to exalt, to benumb, to bewitch, to arrest our sensibility. It liberates a new lyricism of gestures which because it is distilled and spatially amplified, ends by surpassing the lyricism of words. Finally it breaks away from language's intellectual subjugation by conveying a sense of a new, deeper intellectualism hidden under these gestures and signs and raised to the dignity of special exorcisms.¹¹¹

Like Artaud and Brecht, Jellicoe made an attempt at removing theatre from its elitism, hoping to make it available to everyone, irrespective of education.¹¹² She focused on audience participation and on conveying the workings of a sort of primitive unconscious. In fact, as soon as 'we deliberately extract ourselves from participation in what is happening and ask what any particular line or section means, we are lost and the play is lost to us'.¹¹³ The frame of the play was constructed to increase intensity, according to Jellicoe's view that 'if you increase the challenge to

belief you also increase the theatricality'.¹¹⁴ Despite much critical acclaim, the risks and limits of this technique were equally emphasised. Hostile critics argued that the dichotomy between theatricality and the anarchic vision is too great and consequently, 'The potentially explosive rituals are defused by turning the action into children's games'.¹¹⁵

The play takes the form of a kind of ritual, involving a few street-gang members from the tabloid headlines. Yet Jellicoe used this format to address remarkably similar issues to those raised by Bagnold and Delaney, such as motherhood and the crisis in contemporary perceptions of masculinity. Repetition is a key technique in the play, the various characters echoing each other and functioning as a chorus. Their dialogue has, in fact, an 'incantatory effect';¹¹⁶ the sounds they produce being mostly of an inarticulate nature while their interactions and frequent mood-swings are all underlined by an on-stage musician. Steve, the musician who does not leave the set at all during the performance, acts as a link between the audience and the characters' ritualistic world. Wandor saw him as 'the personification of the unconscious onstage', which - due to his auxiliary role to the action - becomes part of the theatrical illusion and a reassuring real presence.¹¹⁷ Jellicoe was particularly concerned with the social significance of the ritual, both in the connections between the various characters/actors and the emotional appeal of the play/performance to the members of the audience:

We create rituals when we want to strengthen, celebrate or define our common life or common values, or when we want to give ourselves confidence to undertake a common course of action.¹¹⁸

What makes following the play's course more difficult - yet also more challenging - is the fact that Jellicoe introduced a contradictory split between the 'conscious level of expression through the dialogue' and the 'unconscious

demonstration of meaning on stage through movement, gesture and rhythm'.¹¹⁹ As she explained:

Most of the people in the play distrust emotion and haven't the means to express it anyway, and they tend to say things which they think will sound good. But at the same time they betray their real feeling either by what they do or by the very fact that they need to assume a mask.¹²⁰

The play is based on a myth that simultaneously deals with the issue of motherhood and insecurity. It is concerned with 'fear and rage at being rejected from the womb or tribe', reworking an ancient tale according to which 'a man, rejected by his mother, castrates himself with a stone knife'.¹²¹ Discussing the various forms the representation of the mother took in post-war British drama, Wandor concluded that it was only Jellicoe who addressed the myth of man's rejection by his mother. Most leading contemporary male playwrights - such as Wesker, Arden or Pinter - stressed the necessary emotional distance between their heroes and the maternal figure, while Osborne's Jimmy Porter actually advocated the total rejection and destruction of maternal power in order to be able to discover his identity as a man. Jellicoe's play does not, in fact, even feature what one might call an actual mother. The 'mad mother' of the title refers to the character of Greta, the spiritual leader of the gang, who is generally interpreted as an embodiment of Kali, the Indian goddess of creation and destruction: 'All creation is the sport of my mad mother, Kali'.¹²² Another layer of correspondence links Kali's rejection of her son to Greta's turning away from Cone, the male character most attached to her, before she gives birth. In response, Kali's son castrates himself, according to the ancient Hindu myth, while Cone commits suicide.

Motherhood does not appear till a relatively advanced stage in the play, but Greta, the young woman who is eventually revealed as pregnant, is an authority figure in the group long before there is any reference to birth or maternal power.

Jellicoe's stage directions require that 'the focus of attention' should go with her whenever she moves away from the rest of the group. It is Patty, the character who stands for the conventional stereotype of femininity (pretty and passive, wearing make-up and always curling her hair) who first refers extensively to Greta. Patty makes a very long speech about the absent Greta (in Wandor's words, 'the absent mother'), that culminates in her desire for identification with Greta. In spite of Patty's onstage physical presence it is Greta's suggested amazing offstage power that overwhelms both Patty's and the play's audiences: 'I wish I was Greta. [...] anyone'll do anything for her'.¹²³

When Greta finally appears for the first time she joins the group in their dressing up ritual, using the clothes of Dodo who symbolises the unfixity of roles and locations, both in terms of gender and age. Dodo has no particular social identity and no language, uttering only scarcely intelligible words or syllables. Being dressed like the rest of the characters, Greta initially manages to remain incognito on stage until spotted by Dean. The Dean/Greta attempt at communication, however, soon ends in failure. Almost instantaneously the play turns into a sequence of ritualistic violence during which Greta is seen as both beating and saving someone from being beaten, being always in control and acknowledged as an authority figure. The duality represented by Greta and suggested by the association with Kali is visually conveyed through Greta's appearance: she has a 'heavily made up and almost dead white' face surrounded by a blood-red hair 'falling from her brow like a Japanese lion wig'.¹²⁴ In Keyssar's reading, Greta's duality operates mainly on an imaginary plane: she remains a remote and isolated character, since her pregnancy 'only names but does not emotively convey the attractive fruitful side of her character'.¹²⁵ When she eventually appears as pregnant in front of the gang, the respect she has been inspiring

beforehand as an authority figure is doubled by an awesome fear triggered by her archetypal maternal power.

This fear is particularly enhanced by the Dean/Greta conflict that underpins the negotiation of gender roles as well as positions of power throughout the play. Both Dean and Greta are outsiders to the community (Dean is American, Greta speaks with an Australian accent) and hence their confrontation can be read as a battle for territory. Their opposition re-enacts the conventional dichotomies between masculine and feminine, civilised and primitive, rational and instinctive, mind and body, culture and nature. Greta also connects herself to the figure of Lilith, Adam's first wife who killed her babies and then gave birth to new ones:

DEAN: And each Friday you dip it [her hair] in blood - in human blood.

GRETA: In baby's blood.¹²⁶

Dean's discourse on the need for morality and kindness, however, is suddenly brought to an end by the start of Greta's birth-pains. In vain does he repeat: 'You're not fit to have a child. [...] You gross thing. Man/woman, cruel. Unstable. Frigid.'¹²⁷

Greta still gives birth at the end of the play.

Thus, the 'bloody organic confusion'¹²⁸ of birth prevails and leads to the castration-cum-death of male characters. Greta not only succeeds in maintaining her power but also intensifies it, and makes a symbolic claim for the continuation of life by expressing her desire to give birth to hundreds and hundreds of children:

GRETA: Rails, rules, laws, guides, promises, terms [...] into the pot with the whole bloody lot. Birth. Birth. That's the thing. Oh, I shall have hundreds of children, millions of hundreds, and hundreds of millions.¹²⁹

Apart from being a statement on Greta's maternal power, this monologue is also an indication of her active sexuality. As in Helen's case in *A Taste of Honey*, motherhood is not meant to be an alternative to sexuality for Greta; all her contacts with the males contain a sexual dimension. Nevertheless, the men (Dean in

particular) feel themselves threatened by Greta's power to mother, a feature that recalls the perception of maternal power as sinister by a range of male characters in contemporaneous male-authored plays (cf. Osborne). Unlike these playwrights, however, Jellicoe elaborates on her male characters' perception of Greta when exploring in detail the impact of her mothering on them.

What is more crucial from the perspective of a feminist analysis, however, is that unlike Osborne's Alison in *Look Back in Anger* and much more like Helen and Jo, Greta presents her own view of herself and the world. In this process she locates herself as the agent of her own will and desire, achieves a position of authority in a male-dominated sub-culture while equally asserting her right to become a mother as well as a sexual being. Motherhood for Jellicoe is entirely removed from its connotations of female biology, tradition and duty, as present in the subtext of both Bagnold's and Delaney's plays. It appears as an exercise of free choice, whilst being a form of symbolic assumption of power and, equally, of strength. It is not located within the context of a mother-daughter relationship or female sisterhood, not even a realistically plausible alternative family arrangement, but in a primitive environment, existing potentially prior to the formation of social units. Jellicoe, however, also presents Greta's motherhood as potentially destructive, despite its connotation to the prolific - a theme that she returned to in *The Rising Generation* (1960).¹³⁰ Here, the protagonist, Mother, seeks control over the world, attempting to eradicate men entirely. Despite Mother's eventual failure (the world is destroyed and reclaimed by male power) and Jellicoe's connection of maternal and patriarchal qualities, the play emphasises the potential for empowerment inherent in maternity and signals yet another breakthrough concerning dramatic structure. In terms of its blending together a multiplicity of theatrical discourses and its achieving a sense of unprecedented

dynamism, Jellicoe's work could not be further removed from the marginal; on the contrary, it constitutes a source of vitality and a symbolic blueprint for women's subsequent work for the stage.

More than a decade after the staging of *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, Ann Jellicoe briefly returned to the Royal Court as its literary manager. This event is particularly relevant in the context of this thesis, as Jellicoe thus became one of the first women literary managers in a key institution of contemporary British theatre. Since its inception, the Royal Court has constituted a unique forum for the staging of new plays and the encouragement of first-time authors, although it often displayed a male bias. Nevertheless, it has had a special significance for women playwrights, whose work has been particularly supported during Max Stafford-Clark's artistic regime. Earlier, Jellicoe herself has made a sustained effort to discover and produce work by women playwrights. As she said herself, she 'found' at least three major women writers - Mary O'Malley, Felicity Brown and Lee Langley, and tried to stage Pam Gem's *Queen Christina*. Looking back on her time as a female senior management worker in a male-dominated environment and as the first woman playwright whose work was produced by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, she contended that she did not feel isolated, as she was 'awfully blind':

I felt I'd done something remarkable, being a woman who'd got through [...] at the same time I didn't appreciate what tremendous disadvantages I was working under [...] the men didn't take a woman seriously.¹³¹

Working in what she termed a 'feminine way' - not privileging 'rational' argument over intuition - was a major impediment for her, however, as was the fact that she had not constructed a clear-cut career plan for the future. Her male colleagues' patronising attitude and lack of trust made her resign from the job and settle down in Dorset in 1979. Since she launched an alternative career as a writer of community

plays, through which she claimed to have found her true vocation in terms of artistic intervention and social work alike:

I'm trying to make theatre valued and respected - which it certainly is not at the moment - to make people understand the excitement of a work of art. I think the beginning is asking them to do something. Not just saying, 'It's wonderful, come along and watch it', but saying, 'help make it'.¹³²

2.5 Conclusions

Although they wrote before the emergence of second-wave feminism, the playwrights considered in this chapter - Enid Bagnold, Shelagh Delaney and Ann Jellicoe - displayed elements that establish a direct connection with certain preoccupations of the Women's Liberation Movement. All three feature independent women protagonists, entirely in charge of their life, who organise their priorities to the best of their abilities. However, for none of these women is womanhood fully dissociated from maternity, be it in a literal or symbolic dimension. Delaney presents Helen and Jo attempting to separate the fact and experience of being a woman from giving birth, yet when they become pregnant they accept motherhood without reservation and see it as a direct outcome of their female destiny. Bagnold calls attention to a woman who has temporarily lost contact with her child (Olivia) only to capture her subsequent longing to re-establish the bond with her estranged daughter. Jellicoe removes motherhood entirely from a family environment, inscribing it exclusively to Greta, a woman functioning as an independent agent of her own will and longing. Jellicoe also associates mothering - and giving birth in particular - with authority and power over others.

In both Jellicoe's and Bagnold's view, gaining authority for a woman acts as a severe challenge to dominant patriarchal regimes (cf. Greta confronting Dean and Miss Madrigal overcoming Pinkbell). Before Madrigal's victory a symbolic sense of

paternity prevailed in 'the chalk garden': in its totalitarian version via Pinkbell and in a caring and sympathetic form via Maitland. Delaney, on the other hand, treats male desire for parenting with considerably more sympathy and support, connecting it to emotional engagement and genuine interest in surrogacy. Geof (and, very briefly, Jimmy) longs to exercise care and domesticity, unrivalled by any of the other (female or male) characters in either Delaney's or Jellicoe's play. Bagnold presents Madrigal as a paragon of surrogate parenting too, yet she eventually renounces this role, privileging instead the natural mother-daughter bond between Olivia and Laurel. Thus, both *The Chalk Garden* and *A Taste of Honey* end with the re-union of biological mothers and daughters, following the subversion of successful surrogate bonds. While in the case of *The Chalk Garden* Bagnold indicates that there are chances for developing a successful relationship between mother and daughter, in *A Taste of Honey* Delaney warns against the lack of promise concerning any improvement. Although they anticipated the gradual disintegration of the nuclear family and the rise of alternative family structures, Bagnold and Delaney could not entirely remove themselves from the norms of their time. It is crucial to stress, nevertheless, that they initiated a transition from the inter-war conservatism of women's theatre by tackling topical issues of sexual politics and, in Delaney's case, by incorporating elements of social realism and music-hall.

Jellicoe's work, on the other hand, constitutes a manifesto of stylistic innovation. Her emphasis on female empowerment - and the utilisation of non-verbal devices (music and ritual) to convey emotions rather than ideas - anticipates feminist writing in its most radical form. It can be read as a direct forerunner to subsequently emerging dramatic 'writings of the body', including Jane Arden's *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven* (1969), Maureen Duffy's *Rites* (1969), Olwen Wymark's *Find Me*

(1977) or Claire Luckham's *Trafford Tanzi* (1978).¹³³ Collating various instances of women's experience, Arden, Duffy, Wymark and Luckham emphatically located woman as the subject of their plays (replicating not only Jellicoe, but also Bagnold and Delaney). Like Jellicoe, these playwrights called for women to find an adequate language and history of their own, but while Arden and Luckham focused on immediate psychological or physical empowerment, Wymark investigated the subversive potential inherent in female mental disorder. Stemming from Greta's 'rebellion', these plays confirm Jellicoe's visionary stance, whilst they continue themselves to prophesise the forthcoming energy of women's writing.

¹ An environment familiar from within to Bagnold, known under her married name as Lady Roderick Jones.

² Bagnold's other work includes: plays - *National Velvet* (London: Heinemann, 1935; turned into an acclaimed film starring Elizabeth Taylor), *Lottie Dundass* and *Poor Judas* (Heinemann, 1951), *The Chinese Prime Minister*, *Call Me Jacky* and *The Last Joke* (published together with *The Chalk Garden* under the title *Four Plays*, Heinemann, 1970); poems - *The Sailing Ships and Other Poems* (Heinemann, 1918), *Poems* (London: Whittington Press, 1978); fiction - *The Happy Foreigner* (Heinemann, 1920) and *Squire* (Heinemann, 1938); an autobiography - *Enid Bagnold's Autobiography* (Heinemann, 1969).

³ Anne, Sebba, *Enid Bagnold: The Authorized Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p. 181.

⁴ It was this prolonged period of preparation and adjustment to management requirements that led to Bagnold's reaction (addressed to Irene Selznick) on the eventual success of her play: 'It isn't so much the pleasure of success that I feel - as the glory of escape from humiliation'. Cf. Sebba, p. 191.

⁵ Bagnold originally intended the role of Miss Madrigal for Katherine Hepburn, but the latter did not like the play and turned the offer down.

⁶ Sebba, pp. 191 and 196.

⁷ Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*, quoted in Sebba, p. 191.

⁸ Bagnold made some alterations to the script finalised with Selznick for the New York production. As she knew that Selznick would not allow these, she contended: 'I have not made any alterations but as it is that an English humorous play is being done in England I have "made bold" to put in a few things I have always wanted. [...] My "collaboration" with her is over. That was in America'. Cf. Bagnold, quoted in Sebba, p. 195.

⁹ There were 658 performances between April 1956 and November 1957. Susan Bennett, 'New Plays and Women's Voices in the 1950s', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, ed. by Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Kenneth Tynan, 'The Chalk Garden, by Enid Bagnold, at the Haymarket', in Kenneth Tynan, *Curtains: Selections from the Drama Criticism and Related Writings* (London: Longmans, 1961), p. 127.

¹¹ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 13.

¹² Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 104.

¹³ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (London: Pluto, 1988), p. 211.

¹⁴ Cf. *Melanie Klein Today: Developments in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elizabeth Bott Spillius, vol.1. (London: Routledge, 1988); Karen Horney, *Feminine Psychology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); Janet Sayers, *Mothering Psychoanalysis* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Russell Grigg, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith, eds., *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic*

Controversies (London: Rebus Press, 1999). The fifties and sixties also witnessed what Mary Daly termed the 'blaming the mother' school of thought, that laid the blame on the 'unhappy, insecure, cold but possessive mother' for the daughter's failure in achieving autonomy and maturity. Cf. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 265. and Lynne Segal, "'Smash the Family?'" Recalling the 1960s', in *What Is to Be Done about the Family?*, ed. by Lynne Segal (Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with the Socialist Society, 1983a) p. 36.

¹⁵ Gale, p. 107. Overall, my selection of inter-war dramatists has been informed by Gale's study.

¹⁶ E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 17-19.

¹⁷ G. B. (Gladys Bronwyn) Stern, *The Matriarch [Tents of Israel]* (London: Virago, 1987).

¹⁸ Gertrude Jennings, 'Family Affairs', in *Famous Plays of 1934* (London: Gollancz, 1934).

¹⁹ Dodie Smith, *Dear Octopus* (London: Samuel French, 1938), p. 89.

²⁰ Clemence Dane, *Moonlight Is Silver* (London: Heinemann, 1934).

²¹ Joan Morgan *This Was a Woman* (London: Fortune Press, 1946).

²² Rona Laurie, preface to Sylvia Rayman's *Women of Twilight* (London: Evans Brothers, 1951).

²³ Rayman, p. 14.

²⁴ Lib Taylor, 'Early Stages', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists since 1958*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths & Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), p. 13. Using a combination of terms and categories launched independently by Elaine Showalter and Patricia Erens, respectively, Taylor distinguishes three phases in women's writing. The first - 'feminist-reflectionist' - refers to works that investigate the female condition and women's lives, yet fail to challenge the status quo in any radical way. The second - 'feminist/revolutionary' - denotes works that push the boundaries of protest further and succeed in questioning both ideology and the declarative dramatic form of the former, such as Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*. Finally, the third category - 'female/ritualistic' - is utilised to include experimental works, often centred on visual and non-verbal means of communication, such as Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother* discussed later in this chapter.

²⁵ Tynan refers to the characters as a 'group of thoroughbred minds', p. 127.

²⁶ Enid Bagnold, *The Chalk Garden* (London: Samuel French, 1956), pp. 52-53. All further quotations are taken from this edition.

²⁷ Lib Taylor, p. 13.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bagnold, p. 14.

³⁰ Bagnold, in Sebba, p. 197. Bagnold also insisted that the characters' names were not allegorical. According to Sebba, though, it cannot be a coincidence that, until Selznick introduced a change, Mrs St Maugham's daughter was named Laura - not too different from Laurian, the name of Bagnold's own daughter. Sebba has explored the connection between the name Madrigal and the Medieval Latin 'Matricale' (womb) and the Italian 'Madregal' (a herb with febrifugal qualities). Cf. 'Metaphor and Dramatic Structure in *The Chalk Garden*', quoted by Sebba, p. 198. - author's name withheld.

³¹ Bagnold, p. 22.

³² Ibid., p. 23.

³³ Ibid., p. 57.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

³⁵ Tynan, p. 127.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 127-128.

³⁸ J.C. Trewin, quoted in Sebba, p. 250.

³⁹ Michael Coveney, review of Enid Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden* in *The Observer* (5 April 1992).

⁴⁰ 'Review of Enid Bagnold's *The Chalk Garden*' in *The Daily Telegraph* (4 April 1992).

⁴¹ After the initial run (27 performances), the play was revived at the Theatre Royal in 1959 and subsequently transferred to Wyndham's Theatre in the West End. Following an almost yearlong run (368 performances). This production continued over another year in New York, from October 1960. Cf. Bennett, 2000, p. 41.

⁴² Griffiths and Llewellyn-Jones, *British and Irish Women Dramatists since 1958*, p. 4.

⁴³ Raymond Williams, 'New English Drama', in *Modern British Dramatists: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by John Russell Brown (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), pp. 32-33.

⁴⁴ Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre since the War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 70. The connection between Osborne's and Delaney's innovative work was equally reinforced by the way in which *A Taste of Honey* was first advertised. Delaney was labelled 'an angry young woman'

although in other - more commercially oriented instances - she was pictured in direct involvement with popular culture and consumerism ('the teenager of the week' or 'the Françoise Sagan of Salford'). Cf. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 137.

⁴⁵ Bennett, 2000, p. 41.

⁴⁶ T.C. Worsley, 'The Sweet Smell', *New Statesman* (21 February 1959), p. 251.

⁴⁷ Jimmy Porter is also rendered marginal by his bohemian spirit, in spite of - or perhaps owing to - his location at the crossroads between two social classes and cultural traditions. The characters in Ann Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, although of a vaguely working-class origin, do not seem to have any specific social or cultural roots; a fact that evokes on another level the mythical and ritualistic nature of the play.

⁴⁸ Lindsay Anderson, 'Review: *A Taste of Honey*', in *The Encore Reader*, p. 78.

⁴⁹ Shelagh Delaney in interview, Laurence Kitchin, *Mid-Century Drama* (London: Faber, 1962), p. 168.

⁵⁰ Anderson, p. 79.

⁵¹ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 12. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

⁵² Contemporary review from *The Times*, reproduced in *Look Back in Anger: A Casebook*, ed. by John Russell Taylor (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 35.

⁵³ Alongside 'anger', 'youth' was the other term connected to the attempts for social change in the mid-fifties. Economic prosperity was responsible for introducing the icon - in Mark Abrams' words - of the 'teenage consumer' with an income of their own and with expectations for conspicuous consumption.

⁵⁴ Peter Lewis, *The Fifties* (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 117-143.

⁵⁵ JO: "I really do live at the same time as myself, don't I?" Delaney, p. 70.

⁵⁶ Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context, 1956-1965* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 20.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Delaney, p. 35.

⁵⁹ Lib Taylor, p. 13.

⁶⁰ Music-hall, alongside the 'ritual Saturday cinema show', was one of the major influences on Delaney's style, although she originally started *A Taste of Honey* as a novel. (Delaney interviewed by Kitchin, *Mid-Century Drama*, pp. 167-168.) She transformed it into a play after she saw Terence Rattigan's *Variations on a Theme* and concluded that she could not only write better than that but also 'correct' Rattigan's portrayal of homosexuality.

⁶¹ Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 40.

⁶² Terry Lovell addresses the issue of role and generation reversal between Helen and Jo in terms of their response to sexuality. Cf. Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and stories in 1960s British realism', *Screen*, 31:4. (Winter 1990), p. 371.

⁶³ Delaney, p. 39.

⁶⁴ Keyssar, 1984, p. 40.

⁶⁵ Delaney, p. 76.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

⁷⁰ Cf. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

⁷¹ Delaney, p. 55.

⁷² Ibid., p. 56.

⁷³ Lovell, p. 371.

⁷⁴ It was the sexuality of Geof that generated the most censorial objection; a number of alterations being required in order to obtain the original licence for performance. Although it was 'recognized that Geof had to be homosexual, his homosexuality [needed to be] played down as much as possible' (Marwick, p. 137.), including Geof's 'coming out' speech and a reference by Helen to Geof ('castrated little clown'). In the wake of the 1957 Wolfenden Report, of course, Delaney could hardly proceed otherwise. According to the Report, both male homosexuality and prostitution were situated at the boundary between 'private moral conduct' and 'public order and decency', in a grey and delicate area potentially open to the threat of authoritative control and sanctioning.

⁷⁵ Delaney, p. 48.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

⁷⁹ Lacey, p. 95.

⁸⁰ Michelene Wandor, *Look Back in Gender* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 42.

⁸¹ Delaney, p. 81.

⁸² I utilise the terms 'female/femaleness' in order to address the biological category ascribed to 'woman', and 'feminine/femininity' to denote an independent, culturally constructed category.

⁸³ Wandor, 1987, p. 42.

⁸⁴ John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema, 1956-63* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 166-167.

⁸⁵ Delaney, p. 87.

⁸⁶ It is the character of Helen that is exposed perhaps to most alterations, depending on the reading of the director. In the Littlewood production she was a 'decisive break with naturalism, drawn direct from the good-time working-class woman of the music-hall, with, somehow, flesh and blood as well as "heart"', Stuart Hall, 'Beyond Naturalism Pure: The First Five Years', in *The Encore Reader*, p. 214.

⁸⁷ Sue-Ellen Case, 'The Power of Sex: English Plays by Women, 1958-1988', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. VII/27. (August 1991), p. 238.

⁸⁸ Lib Taylor, p. 19.

⁸⁹ Cf. Jo's attraction to the world of 'the other' and the marginalised: the black sailor and the sexually ambivalent Geof.

⁹⁰ As an indication of the popularity of the play - and of the expectations associated to the film - it is worth mentioning that American investors offered to back the film if Audrey Hepburn appeared in the role of Jo. Eventually, the film turned out to be an entirely British enterprise, featuring Rita Tushingham in the role of Jo and, in fact, launching her career.

⁹¹ Especially if it is taken into account that Delaney's original text was thoroughly revised and abridged in rehearsals by Littlewood - adaptations that Delaney allegedly failed to notice at first - one witnesses an exceptional artistic encounter between two traditions of innovative cultural production, the Royal Court and Theatre Workshop. Cf. Howard Goorney: 'I don't think [Shelagh] noticed the difference between her draft and the company's adaptation', quoted in Joan Littlewood, *Joan's Book*, (London: Methuen, 1994), p. 518.

⁹² Keyssar, 1984, p. 42.

⁹³ The film features an interlude at Blackpool, merely mentioned in the play, showing memorable scenes of the late fifties' sense of working-class adult entertainment. Richardson offers a grotesque amplification of the shallowness of this entertainment, especially if one contrasts this scene with the sequence when Jo and Geof visit a funfair. This latter event - equally devised by Richardson - acts as a background to the mutually supportive relationship between Jo and Geof.

⁹⁴ Jimmy and Jo kiss under the starlit sky, Geof makes his awkward attempt at 'starting something' on a hillside, while Jo and Jimmy make love on a waste ground. Cf. Lovell, p. 374.

⁹⁵ Lacey, p. 172.

⁹⁶ Delaney, *The Lion in Love* (London: Methuen, 1961).

⁹⁷ Edward J. Esche connects Jo's earlier claim for 'uniqueness' with her preference for such companions as the black sailor and the gay art student. Cf. 'A Taste of Honey: A Semiotic Reading', in *The Death of the Playwright: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*, ed. by Adrian Page (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 79. From this perspective, indeed, Jo succeeds in resisting the pattern imposed by her mother.

⁹⁸ Cf. Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986b).

⁹⁹ Delaney was writing at a time when abortions were illegal and extremely dangerous in Britain. She chose not to suggest such a solution, despite the existence of precedents (films) that have tackled this option. Contraception, available in the late fifties in a secretive way, is not mentioned at all in the play, though, as if reinforcing the fact that such phenomena were not really supposed to be talked about at the time.

¹⁰⁰ Keyssar, 1984, p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Judith Thompson, '"The World Made Flesh": Women and Theatre', in *The Death of the Playwright: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*, p. 40.

¹⁰² 'The corporeality of language stirs up our sensuality, wakes it up, pulls it away from indifferent inertia'. 'I feel the political fecundity of mucus, milk, sperm, secretions which gush out to liberate

energies and give them back to the world'. Cf. Chantal Chawaf, 'Linguistic Flesh', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), p. 177-178.

¹⁰³ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (original title *Le rire de la méduse*), in *New French Feminisms*: 'By writing her self, the woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her'. (p. 250.) 'It's with her body that she vitally supports "the logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true [...]. There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink.' (p. 251.) 'Women must write through their bodies'. (p. 256.) Cf. also Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 113-119.

¹⁰⁴ Jane de Gay, reflecting on her interview with Ann Jellicoe, in Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, *Feminist Stages* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), p. 296. This view parallels Cixous's statement on the impossibility of definition: 'It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded - which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist'. Cf. Cixous, 1981, p. 253.

¹⁰⁵ Ann Jellicoe, interview in *New Theatre Magazine*, quoted in John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After* (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 78.

¹⁰⁶ Jellicoe, 'Covering the ground', in *Women and Theatre: Calling the Shots*, ed. by Susan Todd, (London: Faber, 1984), p. 84.

¹⁰⁷ John Russell Taylor, 1962, pp. 74-75.

¹⁰⁸ Jellicoe, preface to *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (London: Faber, 1964).

¹⁰⁹ Jellicoe, interview quoted in John Russell Taylor, 1962, p. 76.

¹¹⁰ Judith Thompson, p. 36.

¹¹¹ Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', in *The Theatre and Its Double*, transl. by Victor Corti (London: Calder Publications, 1993,) p. 70.

¹¹² Critics have also signalled the (partial) inaccessibility of Artaud's - and indeed Jellicoe's - work to the general public.

¹¹³ John Russell Taylor, 1962, p. 76.

¹¹⁴ Jellicoe, quoted in Innes, p. 420.

¹¹⁵ Innes, p. 420.

¹¹⁶ John Russell Taylor, 1962, p. 75. Also cf. Artaud, p. 70.: 'Abandoning our Western ideas of speech, it [theatre language] turns into incantation'.

¹¹⁷ Wandor, p. 44.

¹¹⁸ Jellicoe, in interview, quoted in John Russell Taylor, 1962, p. 76.

¹¹⁹ Wandor, p. 43.

¹²⁰ Jellicoe, in Wandor, p. 43.

¹²¹ Jellicoe, quoted in Wandor, p. 43.

¹²² Hindu hymn, used as a motto to the play.

¹²³ Jellicoe, *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (London: Faber, 1985), pp. 111-2. All further quotations are taken from this edition.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 143.

¹²⁵ Keyssar, 1984, p. 46.

¹²⁶ Jellicoe, p. 157.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 165.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 167.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

¹³⁰ Jellicoe, 'The Rising Generation', in *Playbill Two*, ed. by Alan Durband (Hutchinson, 1969).

¹³¹ Jellicoe, in Todd, p. 90.

¹³² Ibid., p. 96.

¹³³ Cf. Jane Arden, *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven* (Calder and Boyars, 1971); Maureen Duffy, 'Rites'; Claire Luckham, 'Trafford Tanzi' and Olwen Wymark, 'Find Me', in *Plays by Women*, vol. 2., ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen, 1983).

Chapter 3

Public versus Private, Career versus Family:

Seventies and Early Eighties Images of Bourgeois and Cultural Feminism

3.1 Introduction

After the initial undivided response generated by the emergence of second-wave feminism in the late sixties, feminists in the seventies were gradually faced with a dilemma: either to 'make a separate culture' or 'demand access to the mainstream'.¹ Most theorists and supporters of the movement joined the debate and identified themselves with one of the two tendencies. Thus, a binary opposition was set up - women advocating either a radical feminist stance, entirely isolating themselves from the male world, or the likelihood of achieving equality with men. However, later in the decade the concept of the so-called 'third way'² also emerged, promoting a fusion between the two contradictory approaches. In theory therefore, the distinct nature of being a woman could continue to be acknowledged, while an engagement with 'the main currents and institutions'³ became equally plausible. In fact, however, the issue of women's precise location with regard to a male-dominated culture developed into a central question for feminism, which has not been entirely settled to this day. In the seventies this dilemma was positioned at the very core of women's intervention - from politics to sociology, theory to fiction, the visual arts to popular culture.

A number of important artists viewed the experiences of the two sexes as irrevocably intertwined, stressing the difficulties and even the pointlessness of attempting separation. Angela Carter featured a woman born out of a man's body in her allegorical novel, *Passion of New Eve* (1977),⁴ whereas Pam Gems - in *Queen Christina* (1977) - examined the case of a woman first socialised as a man and then required to suddenly identify as a woman. Laura Mulvey's 1975 film, *Riddles of the Sphinx*, also scrutinised the idea of symbolic fusion between the two sexes and genders, while focusing on the psychological and social dilemmas of parenting.⁵ In 1978, the Hayward Gallery exhibited Wendy Taylor's sculpture, *Brick Knot*, showing the artist herself caught inside it. Taylor's sculpture metaphorically placed the focus on the complexities inherent in finding a satisfactory remedy to women's social and psychological dilemmas. Though being caught inside the constraining knot might have equally warned against (female) biological supremacy, it also signalled an awareness of the initially unacknowledged 'snares' on the terrain of feminist intervention. Fuelled by the awakening realisation of the 'immensity of what had been undertaken',⁶ a considerable amount of caution as well as ideological divergence took over in feminist work, in place of the previous unity and expectation of immediate solutions.

This context of theoretical complexity and lack of certainty was matched in the political arena by frequent changes in government: a Conservative government was elected in 1970, Labour returned to power in 1974, and then in 1979 the Conservatives were elected again. Despite the lack of governmental continuity, the seventies boasted major regulations in social work, the health service and local government: the Equal Pay Act (1970), the Family Income Supplement Act (1971), the Divorce Reform Act (1971), the Race Relations Act (1972) and the Sex

Discrimination Act (1975), aimed at creating a framework for a fairer negotiation of power relations between employees and employers. However, the period continued to witness increases in unemployment and trade union protests (miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974), intensification in race riots, as well as a more severe control on immigration. The Western world in general - and the United Kingdom was no exception - was experiencing, from about 1974, a period of extremely low economic growth that triggered unemployment and, ultimately, recession. The cost of living rose by 23% between 1974 and 1974, while unemployment reached 14 million by 1977. In order to cope with the situation, the British government adopted a number of deflationary policies, which - indirectly - resulted in the subversion of the economic progress women as a social class had made so far. Since, especially, married women and part-time workers were made redundant women found themselves in a particularly vulnerable position on the job market. Thus, the occupational segregation along the gender divide continued to sharpen, instead of disappearing.

In parallel with economic crises and social unrest, the seventies came to be gradually seen as a period of consolidation [and] heart-searching'.⁷ Perhaps more than any decade before it in the twentieth century, it invited, on the one hand, an ardent re-evaluation and nostalgia of the past, and on the other, a new - reserved and apprehensive - approach with regard to the future. Christopher Booker argued that the seventies marked a watershed in the sense that it led to the realisation that chaos and disaster was an option for the end of the second millennium, thus weakening previously held beliefs in continuous human progress.⁸ Increasingly, a sense of concern and fatigue took over, entirely removed from the euphoria that ushered in the decade in the wake of the 'swinging' sixties.

The seventies represented a decade of massive transformations from the perspective of women's voice in the public sphere. Following the first major conference of British feminists at Ruskin College in Oxford in 1970, Women's Liberation demonstrations - for abortion rights, equal opportunities and payment in the workplace - kept being organised on a regular basis. Apart from direct campaigning or support for trade union interventions, women's activism also became channelled to the medium of theatre - leading to the formation of major women-centred theatre groups, such as the Women's Theatre Group and Monstrous Regiment - and to women-oriented press (see, for instance, the establishment of *Spare Rib*, a very popular feminist glossy, in 1972).

The British political scene, meanwhile, featured an exhausted Labour Government, still dedicated to furthering women's interests, losing popularity by the day. The decay culminated in the 1978-79 'Winter of Discontent', when low-paid public-sector employees rebelled against their consistently low wages. It was against this popular disappointment with the inefficiency of the State that the Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher emerged (elected in 1975), with a totally different view of society, highlighting the merits of individualism and self-help. Winning the election - under the punning slogan 'Labour isn't working' - and becoming Prime Minister in 1979, Thatcher set out to bring together

the instincts of individual greed and collective self-righteousness into a coherent model of the world, in which the rhetoric of freedom [could] co-exist with the reassertion of virtue.⁹

This focus on individualism had the effect of subduing the general public's expectations of the State as the ultimate benefactor; expectations labelled as unjustified and exaggerated by right-wing liberal analysts and politicians. However, what the right was offering in return, according to Stuart Hall, was but a populism of

a different kind: 'an authoritarian populism of the right', drawing upon nationalistic and anti-collective sentiments.¹⁰ Instead of addressing the welfare of the nation, the new government recommended achieving success on an individual basis. Thatcher claimed that she came to office with the intent to change Britain from 'a dependent to a self-reliant, from a give-it-to-me to do-it-yourself society; to a get-up-and-go instead of a sit-back-and-wait-for-it Britain'.¹¹ As a Conservative councillor pointed out: 'The chequebook and the pill ha[d] been very liberating',¹² seeing both as metaphors for (women's) individual control - over finances and reproduction - in an attempt 'to cope on one's own', without any significant external interference.

The idealisation of the active working woman by Conservative ideology did not last long though. While in the early stages of her political career Thatcher insisted on the necessity of women's presence in the labour market, by the time she became Prime Minister she advocated that the ideal for women was the career of the housewife and of the mother who raised children. She claimed repeatedly that the family unit needed to remain 'secure and respected' and that 'bringing up the family [was] the most important thing of all'.¹³ 'Women know that society is founded on dignity, reticence and discipline', she contended, therefore it is women's task to provide caring since 'women bear the children and create and run the home'.¹⁴ She pointed out that nothing further had to be corrected in women's condition, as the battle for women's rights has basically been won. Despite calling herself the leader of 'the party of the family', Thatcher did not address the welfare of mothers or large families. The Conservative Government reduced the value of maternity and child benefits, already among the lowest in Western Europe, while Thatcher, as Education Secretary in 1971, earned the nickname 'Milk-snatcher' for having cut government funding for children's school milk.

While Thatcher did not indicate any immediate interest in women's networks ('I hate those strident tones we hear from some women's Libbers')¹⁵ she would not have been able to win several elections without the support of women voters.¹⁶ In spite of her non-affiliation to the Women's Movement and feminism she succeeded in maintaining an appeal for women that not only ensured her re-election but turned her into an admired - though not copied - paragon of success.

In fact, the lack of followers of Thatcher's model, alongside increasing economic difficulties, led to women's unemployment of 27.6% between 1979 and 1986. The only notable increase in women's employment occurred in part-time work, largely in the service industries. However, part-time work continued to be lower paid and less prestigious than its full-time counterpart, thus reinforcing the polarisation between middle-class professional women and less qualified part-time workers. Between 1979 and 1983 the bottom 10% of earners achieved only a 5% increase, while the top 10% achieved 28%, in the conditions when the tax was dropped from 33% to 25% for the low earners and from 83% to 40% for the high earners.¹⁷ It was these conditions that confirmed the emergence of 'two nations' within modern Britain, of a society divided not only along geographical boundaries but also between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

The maintenance of already existing jobs for women who wanted to have a family yet return to their paid work afterwards continued to be problematic too. In the wake of the Employment Act, employers could more easily refuse maternity leave to their women employees, thus restricting women's choices concerning not only the precise timing but also the very assumption of childbirth. This lack of encouragement for parenting, however, did not lead to a professional promotion of

women, as statistics laid bare the fact that even in 1988 women made up only 6% of directors and 10% of senior managers in Britain.

Despite its lectures about the necessity of attending to the individual's needs, Thatcher's government neglected a large percentage of its electorate by its major decisions, culminating in the poll tax that led to the downfall of Thatcher. The figure of the woman prime minister symbolically encapsulated this duality between appearances and essence. Clearly female but not exactly feminine, fair yet firm, apparently traditional yet at the same time artificially constructed, with a sense of authority encoded in her trained voice, Thatcher could emulate role models as diverse as 'Britannia and Boadicea, Florence Nightingale and even Mother Theresa'.¹⁸ In the words of the Labour politician Barbara Castle, Thatcher sported a 'combination men fear most: a brain as good as theirs plus a mastery of the arts of femininity',¹⁹ embodying 'female power which unites patriarchal and feminine discourses'.²⁰ According to Beatrix Campbell, however, Thatcher 'has not feminised politics, but has offered feminine endorsement to patriarchal power and principles'.²¹

This unique combination of masculine and feminine gender traits became emblematic for the emerging eighties' concept of powerful women. The following analysis is centred on the ways powerful women were represented in three important women-authored plays written in the decade 1972-1982. Caryl Churchill's *Owners* and *Top Girls* were published, respectively, at the beginning and end of the period, while Pam Gems's *Queen Christina* appeared in 1977. Only Marlene - the protagonist of *Top Girls* - can be considered a genuine Thatcherite: however, Marion - the ambitious property developer in *Owners* - exhibits character traits that prefigure the Thatcher phenomenon, since for both Marion and Marlene the utmost desire for achievement motivates and legitimises all other actions. It is equally important to

stress in this context that whilst Thatcher only became Prime Minister in 1979, she had been occupying high profile political posts for several years before becoming a leader of the Conservative Party in 1975. Moreover, reading *Owners* in the light of the subsequent Thatcher era, Churchill's visionary talent becomes increasingly self-evident, if not prophetic.

While Thatcher and Churchill's protagonists maintain their femininity yet deploy a consistent effort towards a certain intellectual and behavioural masculinity, Gems's Christina looks and behaves like a man, and in her rare attempts at passing as a female she resorts to performance and to a self-conscious masquerade.²² Queen Christina is also a pre-Thatcherite figure, but unlike Marion she is constantly interrogating the internal contradictions within feminist discourse in the seventies. The issue of accommodating family life to a career arises in all three plays, but the dilemma created by the opposing choices is by far the strongest for Christina. In contrast to Marion's and Marlene's bourgeois-egalitarian feminism, Christina tackles and subsequently rejects radical feminism before briefly identifying herself as a socialist feminist. Eventually, she refuses to privilege any particular stance, thus echoing Gems's own reservations towards feminism. The end note, therefore, is one of ambivalence, re-stating the question addressed at the start of this chapter: should women build a separate culture of their own or keep on demanding access to a mainstream society exclusively identified hitherto with masculine values?

3.2 History Revisited: Pam Gems's *Queen Christina*

Art is of necessity. Which is why we need woman playwrights just now very badly. We have our own history to create, and to write. Personally, I think there will be brilliant women playwrights. I think the form suits us. Women are very funny, coarse and subversive. All good qualities for drama, and for the achievement of progress by the deployment, not of violence, but of subtlety, love and imagination.²³

Despite the manifesto-like qualities of the above statement, Pam Gems has had a complicated relationship with feminism in the course of her career as a playwright. In fact, Gems has not acknowledged any association with the labels 'woman playwright', 'feminist icon' or the rather pompous 'grand dame of British Theatre'.²⁴ Claiming to believe in 'the individuality of choice and responsibility',²⁵ for her the term 'icon' connoted a dangerous letting go of responsibility. Nevertheless, she has maintained both her empathy with and distance from feminism. Her main objection towards feminist theatre was located in its alleged 'narrowly anti-men'²⁶ stance, though she has addressed issues considered to be feminist without necessarily writing in a polemical way.²⁷ In a controversial 1977 interview with Ann McFerran she claimed that the phrase "'feminist writer" [was] absolutely meaningless', because of its polemical implications, as 'polemic [was] about changing things in a direct political way'.²⁸ Gems later amended this statement, specifying that she did consider herself a feminist in private, and acknowledged her work's feminist perspective. Nevertheless, Gems also contended that her main intention was 'to steer would-be dramatic writers away from the preaching-to-the-converted', 'that ha[d] been so prevalent in committed theatre'.²⁹ In Goodman's reading, the issue in Gems's case was not simply the rejection of a label, but her warning about its 'imprecision', about 'the need for accuracy in terminology, especially when theatre [was] to be used in direct political ways'.³⁰

A major source of Gems's resistance to being labelled as feminist was her desire to present her plays as artistic interventions, rather than mere issue-based, political statements.³¹ 'It's not my job to do propaganda. It's my job to reflect a situation'.³² However, she often contested social, sexual as well as theatrical conventions. In 1977 she contended that 'being labelled feminist create[d] disadvantages for the artist', but then immediately clarified this by saying that she '[did] not question the relevance of the word feminist' to her work; in fact, she admitted that 'the feminist outlook was [her] springboard'.³³ In Gems's understanding 'drama is subversive'³⁴ and 'words' are 'better than guns'³⁵ to 'change everything',³⁶ but theatre should not be considered as an immediate vehicle for social change. Nevertheless, she also declared in 1996 that 'theatre should change things' and artists, in general, 'can affect social change'³⁷ - as in fashion, through gradual shifts and transformations.

Gems has shown ample evidence of experimentation with style and form ('I have such reverence for writers who are true explorers, who break form and content'),³⁸ often combining Brechtian techniques with elements of realism. Her work is also permeated by a consistent preoccupation with historical events and figures, dramatising the 'human reality of women who have been transformed into cultural symbols'.³⁹ from the seventeenth-century Queen of Sweden to Edith Piaf or Camille in the reworking of Dumas's *Dame aux camélias*. Most of her plays - *Queen Christina*, *Piaf*, *Camille*, *The Snow Palace* (featuring a Polish woman writer)⁴⁰ - are focused around one central female protagonist, to whom the male characters are only supportive figures. Susan Bassnett-McGuire has argued that plays such as *Queen Christina* ended up being unavoidably patriarchal owing to their (limited) focus on one central character.⁴¹ For Gems, however, the single protagonist who copes on her

own in a patriarchal environment serves exactly the opposite end: to put across a woman's point of view. Gems is equally committed to writing good roles for women, and the actresses playing Queen Christina and Piaf have had the opportunity of performing on a number of mainstream stages, including the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Queen Christina was originally commissioned in 1974 by Ann Jellicoe, in her capacity as literary manager at the Royal Court. Nevertheless, it encountered a straightforward rejection a year later by the new, male management appointed after Jellicoe's departure. The letter of rejection informed Gems that her play was 'too sprawly, too expensive to do [...] and it would appeal more to women'.⁴² Despite the Royal Court's hostility to the subject matter - in other words, to the centrality of women's experience in the plot - the play was eventually premiered in 1977 at the original Other Place, the RSC's studio theatre in Stratford. *Queen Christina* became the first play by a woman to be staged at Stratford, also directed and designed by women: Penny Cherns and Di Seymour, respectively. The play has been revived since on a number of occasions, including performances by Tricycle Theatre in 1982 and by Absolute Theatre in 1997.

The majority of Gems's women characters are based on historical or fictional figures, as Gems makes an attempt at revisiting history by picking up on various occasions when women had access to challenging roles. Though set in historically disparate moments, Gems's plays may be interpreted as a series of matrilineal texts, as an alternative guide to history, as a way of reclaiming women's presence in culture and society. As she stresses herself,

If you're writing as a woman [...] you want to explode some of the grosser myths that have been erected by men; the sentimentalisation of women and therefore the reduction of them.⁴³

She points out the aspect of power inherent in representation and makes a case for the necessity of 'reparation' on behalf of women. Preoccupied by the question of truth - both in art and life - Gems, however, does not treat her protagonists with positive discrimination. Despite the sympathy that she manifests towards her heroines, she addresses the fact that these characters were not only victims but also at times victimisers, in societies dominated by gender and class hierarchies and unequal power distribution. Both Piaf and Queen Christina are captured in situations in which they 'emulate the very behaviour that initially oppressed them';⁴⁴ Gems thus creates an overall image of ambivalence by the juxtaposition of terms normally located in complementary binary relations.

Queen Christina, for instance, is initially featured scorning her mother, deprecating femininity. Towards the end of the play, after having abdicated, she is shown mourning: yet not for her mother or for the throne she gave up, but for her missed maternal opportunity. Christina does not give birth herself, yet her life constantly moves around the succession and the production of heirs. Gems has referred to this historical parable as a 'uterine play', stressing an essentialist view of sexual and gender identity. Though the play explores a case of transgression against conventional patterns, it takes for granted the connection between womanhood and reproduction, and the centrality of the question of mothering in (most) women's lives. As Gems explained,

I was the pre-Pill generation that got married and had children - no choice - but this seemed to me to be the dilemma that women at this time were in.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Gems is also preoccupied with her subsequent experience of post-Liberation and post-Pill times, in which women have obtained certain economic and sexual liberties. According to Aston, it is central to Gems's work that she constantly

negotiates a 'dual vision', bringing her "before" and "after" experiences to bear on the complications which greater choice and opportunity mean for women'.⁴⁶

The opening of *Queen Christina* shows Christina as a little girl, witnessing her mother giving birth to a stillborn child. This scene, creating a sense of mechanical repetition, is the latest in a series of similar events in which the Queen has been trying to produce a male heir for the throne of Sweden. Finally convinced of the futility of trying for a male baby, the King proclaims his acknowledgement of Christina as the future heir. He only informs Axel, the Chancellor to whom he delegates the task of training Christina as the new successor, and Christina herself about this decision - thus excluding the Queen, the person most directly involved in this process of re-production. To Axel's objections that Christina is of 'the wrong sex' the King's firm reply is 'Make a man of her!' by training and legislation.⁴⁷ The address to the bewildered Christina puts the same idea in a less explicit yet equally decisive format: 'We're going to make a queen of you [...] not like your mother [...] like me, like a king'.⁴⁸ It is this striking opposition between the authoritative father and the silenced mother that forecasts the extremes between which the future Queen Christina will be expected to negotiate: the 'manly qualities of a king and the fecundity of a woman'.⁴⁹

In fact, this artificial interference with gender leads to a total alteration of Christina's existential choices. From the announcement of her succession she is taught to behave like a man. She learns to hunt, fight and develop an interest in intellectual, political and military matters. As she assimilates the characteristic traits of masculinity, she finds that performing the acquired gender becomes easier than behaving according to the conventions of her original gender. For instance, she is metaphorically presented as handling the 'bloody [thirty years'] war' with great

success, yet failing to cope with the pains of the monthly period,⁵⁰ hence participating in another war: with her own body. In another instance, she recommends her German suitor to inspect a tapestry while she is out hunting. All in all, she behaves as a man, having not the slightest intention to pass as a woman.

Unlike Greta Garbo's 1933 movie version,⁵¹ where Christina appeared as a 'shining pale, intellectual beauty, who had romantically chosen freedom',⁵² Gems wanted to call attention to the complex historic context in which the story was set. Although Gems acknowledged the influence upon her technique of filmic devices, such as jump cuts and short scenes,⁵³ she produced a work of a very different nature from that of Hollywood cinema. Gems's protagonist, like the actual historical figure, is 'a dark, plain woman with a crippled shoulder',⁵⁴ in total opposition to Garbo's attractive Christina. Gems's focus is on the confusion of a 'woman caught between the trappings of masculine power' (raised as a man for the throne) and the 'disempowered body of a woman' (suddenly advised to breed children, in order to secure the succession.)⁵⁵ Garbo's character is also encouraged to marry and produce heirs, but her resistance is not a result of shifts in her gender identification but rather of not having found the right partner. Another crucial difference between the two versions is that while Garbo's Christina eventually gives up the throne for passionate love, Gems's protagonist abdicates when she realises the incompatibility between her own understanding and the public perception and expectation of her gender identity. Psychologically identifying herself as a man, Gems's Christina is unable to switch suddenly to the traditional female function of reproduction. In Gems's own account, Christina's major problem is that 'she had unlearned the business of womanhood', a fact that will eventually constitute 'her tragedy'.⁵⁶ Geraldine Cousin approaches her situation from a slightly different, almost complementary angle, shifting the focus

from Christina's inadequate connection to femininity to her identification as a man. She argues that Christina's 'transformation into a man has been too successful', since the "'only truth" she knows is a man's, and she will not "pollute" it'.⁵⁷

Thus, in the quid-pro-quo scene of Act One Scene Two Christina is taken for a man until she reveals her identity. This scene is one of the most powerful in the play as far as challenging the audience's stereotypes is concerned. Gems opens the scene from the male suitor's perspective and thus, the audience find themselves confronted with taken-for-granted perceptions about masculine and feminine identity. Both the suitor and the audience are seduced into believing what seems to be the conventionally most appropriate outcome and consequently, take the wrong person (a beautiful lady-in-waiting) for the Queen. Even after the real identity of Christina is revealed, she keeps on playing with audience expectations and suddenly switches to the role of the frail woman, taking the prince's 'nerveless arm' and standing beside him in 'wifely stance'.⁵⁸ Christina's entrance 'is a set-up that reveals the politicization of the body and its costumes and disrupts the dominant order's assumption of heterosexuality'.⁵⁹ The parodistic reversal of her previous gesture of tapping the prince on the shoulder also forecasts the issue of duality as far as Christina's gender identification is concerned. Using the device of cross-dressing, Gems is able to allow for a 'vision of fluidity of gender options [...], a utopian prospect of release from the ties of sexual difference that binds us into meaning, discourse, culture'.⁶⁰ The irreconcilable opposition between her biological sex and her socially constructed gender will constitute from this point onwards the central focus of the play and will remain unsolved though eventually challenged.

The issue of Christina's looks, or rather the fact that she is nothing to look at, comes up at several subsequent points.⁶¹ It is her overtly feminine and formerly

beautiful mother, however, who directly addresses Christina's ugliness and blames it for her not being wanted by men. As the plot unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear though, that it is not merely her physical plainness that keeps men at bay. Christina also possesses an intimidating intellect, exercised in debates with such icons of rationalism and patriarchal thinking as Descartes and the Pope. Speaking from her own position as a woman who achieved status via her alliance with a man, Christina's mother is unable to understand the dynamics of Christina's male intellectual identification or her unwillingness to yield to conventions.

At this point in the play Christina is in love with her beautiful lady-in-waiting, Ebba and also attracted to the latter's lover and future husband. She is taken over by sexual jealousy, however, once she learns of this love triangle (especially as she is aware of her unattractiveness). It is, in fact, this awareness of her own - and her current suitor's - physical repulsiveness that will constitute a major argument for refusing to breed: 'What sort of a litter do you think we'd produce',⁶² 'No! there's one freak on the throne [...] no need to perpetuate the joke.'⁶³ Although Christina has eventually agreed to her betrothal to Karl, she still vehemently rejects maternity. Her passionate resistance to motherhood conjures up Shulamith Firestone's radical feminist view advocating that women should give up bearing children altogether. Though Christina does not embrace this idea in all its complexity, she manifests no interest in marriage and childbearing. Moreover, her motive is not a denial of the oppression mentioned by Firestone, but an awareness of her own inadequacy with regard to conventional femininity. Despite the fact that Christina's unfeminine looks are continuously played down as part of the court etiquette (CHANUT: 'I see that Your Majesty horribly under-rates herself', 'You find your appearance wanting? Is there a women who does not?'), she remains unconvinced:

CHRISTINA: No man follows me. They follow symmetry, and all the thought in the world won't give me that. No, I'm damned if I'll breed for them. I pollute enough space as it is.⁶⁴

Whilst Christina's statement reinforces the mind/body binary, in a later intervention she deconstructs this patriarchal opposition - making explicit her challenge of conventional expectations with regard to femininity: 'No man who wants a person?'⁶⁵ Her extended conversations with Descartes - through which Gems underpins the interconnection between drama, theory and political practice - only fuel this impulse as she gradually gains enough strength to learn to love the things she *can* have, rather than pursuing unattainable goals. This sudden shift in her expectations towards love recalls Firestone's statement from 1970, according to which 'Love is the pivot of women's oppression'.⁶⁶ As an attempt to liberate herself from the constraints of sexual oppression, Christina adopts an attitude similar to Firestone's, and, throughout the second act, pursues her famously uninhibited and non-committed explorations of sexual identity.

Christina's understanding of sex as dissociated from love can be viewed in parallel with the next stage in the principles advocated by the women's movement. Her approach to sex as a source of pleasure, as well as a terrain where power relations are negotiated, correlates with the stance reached at the First National Women's Liberation Conference in London: 'We can't talk of sex as anything but a joke or a battleground'.⁶⁷ Gradually, in the seventies, the debate on sex as a battleground transformed into a fierce crusade against heterosexuality. The motive invoked by the advocates of this stance was that only those women who cut all their ties to male privilege could be taken seriously in the struggle against male domination. However, Gems does not wish to position Christina as a representative of political lesbianism. She makes her instead consider and then challenge the idea

and practice of female separatism in her crucial encounter with the disciples of this approach, the French bluestockings.

Unlike most of her historically based characters, including Queen Christina, Gems has declared herself a great believer in the values of marriage as commitment. In the play, she places Christina's mother to address the situation of average, non-transgressive women. Confronting Axel on the question of the Thirty Years' War, the Queen Mother claims that women do not 'need to understand theory' as they are too busy just 'keeping their families alive' in the conditions of war.⁶⁸ She recalls her own experience of having tried to produce heirs and being pregnant fifteen years in a row, an experience shared by many married women of her time. As opposed to this sense of duty, Axel advocates access to pleasure without commitment as a result of a straightforward commercial exchange.

Christina's apparent decision to marry Karl can be linked to both her mother's sense of duty and Axel's financially underwritten sexual desire outside marriage. However, above anything else, this marriage is governed by the principle of deferral. By merely agreeing to the idea of marriage she finds herself in a much stronger position to reinforce her own principles. She can instantly declare that 'The prospect of royal marriage is about as attractive as a forced march through mud'⁶⁹ or that she prefers the company of girls in bed. The simile of the forced march simultaneously acts as a reminder of the war currently going on in the country, but also as a reference to Christina's inner conflict between her sex and gender. The constantly increasing split between Christina, the queen, and Christina, the woman, is explored further in an exchange with Chanut, who besides his ambassadorial duties is also a medical doctor. At her vehement protest against a diet of vegetables

as unsuitable for a queen, Chanut contends that it had actually been prescribed for the woman, not the monarch.

This dual nature of Christina's identity, both monarch and woman, is emphasised even more abruptly by Axel. Having so far related to Christina as the man he himself has trained, Axel suddenly expects her to give birth to an heir. Christina's answer, however, is a straightforward 'You can't have both', thus sealing her irreversible transformation into a man.⁷⁰ Passionately arguing against her duty to give birth, she pleads for chastity and claims Axel's respect for the transgender being he has turned her into: 'I will not rape a man. Nor will I be the woman for you to despise. Between the two you have put me off'.⁷¹ Displaced halfway between the sexes, Christina is aware that - despite her bisexuality - she represents but an intellectual companion for men: 'they don't like me [sexually], [...] so I'm out of it'.⁷²

As for women, she has never identified as one, since following male role models led her to develop only contempt and occasional sexual desire for women. Thus, understanding such traditionally feminine preoccupations as gestation and childcare seems totally alien to her. Her mother's continuous pregnancies and stillborn babies have triggered a profound repulsion in her towards anything that has to do with children: 'I'm damned if I breed for them and be destroyed like my mother'.⁷³ She calls the expectant Ebba a 'pregnant cow' and parallels the naturalness of pregnancy with that of the 'plague'. Instead of acting as an incentive, therefore, Ebba's pregnancy has the opposite effect: of reinforcing Christina's determination to 'let somebody else breed the tribe'.⁷⁴

The revelation of Christina's genuine plans, however, starts off with contradictory signals (during the final scene in Act One, 'Abdication'). The

monarch's silver throne is brought in while Christina appears dressed in white, with her crown on her head. But just as everyone prepares for a marriage, she asks the bishop to take her crown off. She offers the crown first to Axel ('Take your crown', 'You've been its guardian all your life')⁷⁵ and then hands it over to Karl. Another symbol she parts with is a large sapphire and diamond brooch that she offers to her mother, as if renouncing the last emblem of her femininity, as well as her social status. The scene ends with Christina ripping off her wedding dress to reveal riding clothes and boots, and ecstatically running out of the room and, by extension, out of the constraint of tradition and gender stereotyping. It is ultimately the metonymy of the (wedding) dress, abandoned on the throne, that reiterates Christina's 'gender-based conflict between marriage, reproduction and disempowerment on the one hand, and monarchy, non-childbearing body, and power on the other.'⁷⁶

Act Two follows Christina on her self-chosen exile, exploring new ways of life in France and Rome. These encounters act as the confrontation of two sets of ideologies (feminism and Catholicism), both of which she is very tempted to consider though neither will eventually prove convincing enough for her. Without being aware of it herself, her loyalty to her principles has transformed her into an icon of transgression for women throughout Europe. However, her meeting with the French Bluestockings leaves both parties dissatisfied when they find that, in fact, all they have in common is the refusal to marry and breed (further) children. There is a discrepancy between the almost brutal simplicity of Christina and the mannered style of the French ladies, an opposition that replicates on a different level the controversy between grassroots, practical and theoretical, academic feminism.

The ladies, having previously been married, now advocate a complete isolation of women's lives from those of men ('To submit to men is a treachery to

our cause').⁷⁷ Inspired by the seventies' privileging of political lesbianism as a resistance to male oppression and the only solution for women's genuine liberation,⁷⁸ Gems's ladies advocate a radical, uncompromising feminist stance. Christina, on the other hand, admits to having difficulties with adjusting to the company of women ('you can't get any sense out of them').⁷⁹ Though Christina's stance is a product of her conditioning (she was raised as a man, removed from the world of women), her attitude echoes a major problem associated with feminism as a movement: 'The idea that you had to chose between men and the women's movement was quite an oppression'.⁸⁰ Though she declares herself a sceptic, Christina's attraction to Catholicism - a religion dominated by paternal authority figures - introduces another gap between the positions of the two parties, placing her in an anti-feminist stance. When asked to join in the cause to demand the same freedoms for women as men currently have and hence, enrol in an equality-feminist engagement, Christina declines involvement and anticlimactically promises to write from Rome. Having contemplated several alternative feminist models, Christina concludes this stage of her quest by postponing any definite decision. She has once again indicated what she is not interested in, rather than taking a firm stance.

Discrepancies in opinion also emerge in her theological discussions with the Pope. Christina finds that the Pontiff's opinions on women's role in society and on the importance of families and parenting are similar to the ones she has been defying in Sweden. The Pope reinforces the same concern with the need for heirs and sees 'women's sacred destiny' exclusively in procreation.⁸¹ He also lectures her on the containment of desire within marriage and the necessity of controlling sexual urges for other than procreative purposes. None of Christina's counter-arguments seem to convince him, not even the ones that emphasise the actual waste of nature, such as

women's menstrual flow or men's ejaculations, as evidence of the lack of a complete correspondence between reproduction and sex. Eventually, she tackles the question of love as the principle on which society should be organised. But she cannot dissociate the 'command to love', advocated by the Pope as a biblical imposition, from the 'command to *be* loved', the desire Christina has always had, but has never really had the chance to explore.⁸² This approach can be read as Gems's questioning the politicisation of private lives. Although second-wave feminism began with the commandment that 'the personal is political', it has subsequently generated severe internal contradictions, especially as far as women's sexual orientation is concerned. A major source of such tension was provided by certain patterns of behaviour and identification, such as lesbianism, being adopted with an exclusively political scope. By liberating the realm of personal life from political interpretations Gems seems to be arguing for a new kind of feminism, characteristic in general of the late eighties and nineties, that does not wish to 'colonise women's private lives'⁸³ and offer generalising formulae.

For Christina, the commandments 'to love' and 'be loved' have never gone together spontaneously, and 'being loved' was only achievable by recompensing the partner. The ultimate example of this kind of relationship in the play is Christina's encounter with Monaldescho. This is a straightforward heterosexual relationship, without any preconceived vindictiveness towards the male partner; one in which female power, in the shape of Christina's social status, is traded for Monaldescho's physical appeal. Christina has no illusions that Monaldescho is attracted to her as a woman; in fact she takes it for granted that he is fully aware of her former and potential future social status and that this is the source of his interest in her. It is his occasional manifestation of affection that confuses Christina. Such an attitude has

not been stipulated in their initial trade-off and, therefore, unbalances their power relations.

According to this contract, Monaldescho's role is to be loyal to Christina, as if offering a service to an employer. However, when Christina's political career is on the rise again, as a pretender to the throne of Naples, he cannot control his rivalry and violates the contract: 'Why you, you hump-backed mare? Why you?'⁸¹ Thus, Gems tackles the problem of power in relationships from a different perspective: instead of sexual jealousy (as in the *ménage à trois* centred around Ebba) she focuses on professional envy-cum-intrigue. She suggests through this allegory that when careers are at stake male-female partnerships require a new negotiation of terms. Christina's decision to take up the command of the army (since she has the right 'training for it')⁸⁵ makes it impossible for Monaldescho to support her, as he is unable to repress his own ambition any longer. Their trade-off ends at this moment as far as Christina is concerned too. Since Monaldescho already possesses the utmost gift - his good looks - vocational ambition is superfluous.

It is this denial that finally leads Monaldescho to betrayal. At first reluctant to believe that he was capable of betraying her to the enemy, Christina instantly changes her stance when confronted with Monaldescho's desperate plea for mercy: 'Madonna, Madonna [...] I love you'.⁸⁶ Thus, he breaches their contract on multiple levels: not only by perpetrating the betrayal and hence undermining their partnership, but also by addressing the taboo question of love. From then on Christina has no hesitation in commanding and eventually, performing his execution herself. Her only comment - addressed to the appalled onlooker, cardinal Azzolino: 'Are we all to be like you [...] hiding from life in a woman's skirts?'⁸⁷ - formulates her challenge to the

doctrine of Catholicism and reasserts her continuous defiance of the constrictions of gender.

In spite of this climactic scene, uniting will power, sacrifice and performance of gender, Christina's next move is one of seclusion. She falls ill, tormented by a deep sense of guilt for the crime that she committed more out of temper than conviction. She asks for pastoral care, and starts longing for indulgence she previously considered inappropriate, like hot baths and dressing gowns. For the first time she is shown as immobile, with her hands in her lap, in the pose of a desperate or exhausted person. All of a sudden, the woman who has lived in the public sphere finds herself confined to the claustrophobic space of one room that constitutes 'the whole world' for her.⁸⁸ Rejected by Rome, her sole opportunity for re-establishing contact with the political world is by contending for the throne of Poland. Christina is fully aware, however, that the offer is addressed to her male self ('I have *been* a man. I have commanded') who would secure the peace in the name of Catholicism ('You want me, all of you, as a man. You will allow me in [...] to suit your purposes').⁸⁹ However, she also knows that any transgression she might commit to this prescribed role would be sanctioned to the biological woman in her, a persona she never had the chance to explore.

This dilemma - between returning to the mainstream or maintaining anonymity - initiates her challenge not only to the legitimacy of her previous contempt for women but also to her adoption into the male world. Gems captures her protagonist's discovery of the traditional realm of femininity in strong olfactory images:

CHRISTINA: The smell of ironed clothes [...] linen [...] lace - Food [...] baking [...] And babies. The smell of babies. I like the smell of babies - can that be wrong?⁹⁰

Gradually, she experiences sympathy for women and indicates the first signs of identification with their day-to-day lives. A sudden awareness of class inequalities gives voice to a note of socialist feminism through Christina's demand for all women to 'be on the same footing'.⁹¹ She admits her guilt for having previously despised women for their weakness and lack of engagement in political matters. A fact she has chosen to overlook so far now becomes impossible to disregard - women 'have kept us alive!' by nurturing and caring - but also by offering their bodies for the processes of gestation and reproduction: 'They give. And we think nothing of it'.⁹²

At this stage, though increasingly sympathetic to women's social role, she still locates herself on the opposite side of the dichotomy confronting the sexes. She talks about women as 'they', whilst including herself in the 'we' referring to men. It is her next intervention that articulates her desire of identification as a woman: 'I begin to perceive that I am a woman'.⁹³ In spite of her genuine wish to consider herself a woman from then on, however, Christina is also aware that she has missed her opportunity for giving birth. It is only now that she fully perceives the irrevocable nature of the choice that was taken on her behalf: 'I have been betrayed. [...] (*She slaps her abdomen.*) This has been betrayed'.⁹⁴

All of a sudden, contending for the throne does not satisfy her any longer: 'And can Poland give me a child?'⁹⁵ She tackles the previously unexamined question that, in fact, constitutes the central thesis of the play: 'In God's name, why must I choose?'⁹⁶ Why must a woman choose⁹⁷ between having an independent life with a mind of her own, and giving birth to children? Christina is finally able to account lucidly for the fact that, by prioritising the throne, all other choices have been rated secondary: 'I have been denied my birthright. I have been denied the very centre of myself'.⁹⁸ In her own words, she is a victim of 'the privilege of action at the

cost of oneself',⁹⁹ thus giving voice to an emerging sense of individualism alongside the discovery of the maternal, biological drive.¹⁰⁰ Despite having been tempted by an essentialist understanding of sexual division, she suddenly asserts her belief in the social construction of gender. Ironically, it is the biological impossibility of enacting her so-far-repressed female side by having a baby that leads her to acknowledge: 'Nature is us! We are nature! It is we who change and create change!'¹⁰¹

Unable to accept the whim of fate, Christina is captured in the final scene in a hysterical rebellion against this closure of choices. Like the abdication or the quid-pro-quo scenes, the most powerful moments of subversion are the most visually enticing ones as well. Enacting a love-hate relationship, she confronts Azzolino as the representative of patriarchal oppression in both religious and political terms. This confrontation, therefore, encapsulates her so-far-unexpressed protest against having been used as a mere instrument in political machinations. It also acts out as physical violence her longing for the child she has never had or will never have the opportunity to nurture.

Her whipping of the male oppressor can also be read as a parallel to the tarantella dance of the female hysteric, who thus somatises her subversive potential and claims her inner freedom.¹⁰² Whilst Nora's tarantella in Ibsen's - and Gems's - *A Doll's House*¹⁰³ prepares the scene for Nora's final exit from the claustrophobic space of her husband's house, Christina's physical outburst marks the end of her time spent in the public sphere. For Christina, however, this routine is not intended to re-locate her into a 'doll's house', but rather to help her readjust with the new configuration of her trajectory, her gradual identification with her despised feminine persona and her lost mothering potential.¹⁰⁴ In fact, for both Nora and Christina the ritual of the tarantella connotes climactic rebellion versus their repression by

patriarchal regimes. In a study intertwining the image of the sorceress and the potential for contestation inherent in hysteria, Catherine Clément evokes the story of a Southern Italian woman who can be cured of imaginary spider bites only by performing a ceremonial dance. As the woman dances in a 'festival of metamorphosis', she expels the foreign body - the venom - and expresses her passion in 'a forced dance, a tragic happiness'.¹⁰⁵ The hysteric also 'lives with her body in the past' and 'transforms it into a theatre of forgotten scenes', acting out reminiscences of 'a lost childhood that survives in suffering'.¹⁰⁶ During the crisis, pleasure - 'a substitute for orgasm' - comes, 'mimed in all the forms of displacement': 'in acrobatics, in limbs tied in knots, in backs tensed into arcs; and the resolution of the crisis is fatigue, languor, silent immobility'.¹⁰⁷ Hysteria, which the tarantella acts as a metonymy of, has been classified, in Elaine Showalter's term, as a 'female malady'.¹⁰⁸ In other words, through the appropriation of a severely gendered act, Christina emphasises on yet another level her break with her socially constructed gender and her availability for becoming a woman. The hysterical fit also signifies rebirth in Clément's and Cixous's feminist theory; hence Christina emerges as a 'newly born woman', with a potentially stable gender and sexual identity superimposed upon her previous self.

Apart from the scene of hysterical transfiguration, another key symbol in Christina's quest for a new meaning in life is the encounter with Angelica, the daughter of her maid, Lucia. It is only Angelica - a little girl of around the same age as Christina was at the start of the play - who manages to interact with the depressed Christina after the murder of Monaldescho. Cousin reads Angelica as an invocation of Christina's childhood, hence unadulterated, self, unaffected as yet by the transformative manipulations of Axel.¹⁰⁹ Both Christina (in the first scene) and

Angelica are featured hugging their dolls, sharing an interest in traditional feminine values. For a moment, Angelica also acts as a symbolic mother figure to Christina. Christina, having refused all caring attempts, suddenly responds to a performance of motherliness by Angelica, who slaps her gently and gets her to swallow a sweet, a food symbolic in general of love, but 'here of love yet loss'.¹¹⁰ In the following scene, opportunity is created for the reversal of the situation; an opportunity Christina unconsciously takes and which will eventually lead her out from her self-imposed seclusion. At the news that Angelica is choking (somewhere offstage), Christina dashes out of the room and it is only when she returns that she realises having saved not only the life of the little girl but her own too: by escaping psychological turmoil and re-establishing contact with the external world.

Queen Christina, therefore, does not end on a note of resignation. Christina is presented as moving further from the condition of self-flagellation and mourning for lost chances, while constantly demanding an answer to the question: 'Why must I choose?' In an attempt to legitimise the use of a seventeenth-century figure for the exploration of late-twentieth-century situations, Gems acknowledges in her afterword present-day women's wider opportunities for having children while still pursuing a career. She does stress, however, that what is still unresolved and badly needed is the production of 'maps of the new terrain in which we find ourselves'.¹¹¹ In other words, choices no longer have to be as clear-cut as in Christina's time. In fact, in a recent interview Gems claimed that a large proportion of women today do not want to take an active role in the public domain or assume the responsibility of irreversible 'either-or' choices. According to Gems, women are less inclined than men to competitiveness: for her, Thatcher and the style she represented constituted 'the anomaly'¹¹² not the norm.

Nevertheless, another significant segment of contemporary women, those who do want to have a career, still find it confusing to accommodate the often contradictory psychological aspects of their various identities. The notion of a career continues to be associated with a certain sense of masculinity, whereas parenting connotes nurturing femininity. In conditions where traditional images of femininity are forced upon women by the advertising industry or popular fiction, it is still difficult to take a clear stance. Via the juxtaposition of extremes, *Queen Christina* equally asks what it means, in fact, to be 'female' (or indeed, 'male'). Gems presents Christina's suppression of womanhood, yet she places this case study in a broader context exploring the boundaries of individual freedom. To achieve this she creates an emblematic protagonist who turns out larger than life and deliberately overshadows all other, supporting characters. Gems also engages with the possibilities of gender identification. Through Christina's free exploration of both masculine and feminine identities, Gems addresses the avenue of the performance of gender,¹¹³ however, she equally aims at suggesting the necessity of creating 'a society more suited to both sexes'.¹¹⁴

3.3 The Price of Success:

Bourgeois Feminism and the Rejection of Mothering in Caryl Churchill's

Owners and Top Girls

For years I thought of myself as a writer before I thought of myself as a woman, but recently I've found that as I go out more into situations which involve women, what I feel is quite strongly a feminist position and that inevitably comes into what I write. However, that's quite different from somebody who is a feminist using writing to advance that position.¹¹⁵

Owners (1972) was Caryl Churchill's first full-length stage play to be produced by a professional company. It also focused critical attention on the author in a new way, as until then she was mainly known as a prolific writer of radio plays. The play was performed at the Royal Court Upstairs and constituted the first collaboration between the playwright and the Royal Court. This was followed by Churchill's 1975 appointment as the first woman Resident Dramatist at the Royal Court and the joint production of several subsequent plays. Although written in the hey-day of second-wave feminism the play does not feature any obvious seventies feminist character. The issues that Churchill acknowledged were both social (the idea of ownership, involving landlords and tenants) and philosophical (the opposition between Western aggressiveness and Eastern passivity).

However, instead of using traditional gender stereotypes, she decided to centre her play on a gender role-reversal, with the intention of sharpening the contrast between the protagonists: 'The landlord became a woman, because that made the distinction better than if I'd an active man and a passive woman'.¹¹⁶ In fact, instead of having just two characters opposed to each other, Churchill operates with two sets of polar contrasts. The active force is a woman and the major passive factor is a man, while both are surrounded and supported by other characters. For instance,

there are two opposed women: one prefigures the eighties obsession with power and the other connotes a domestic, traditional sense of femininity. Similarly, there is a passive male at the centre, but there are active men as well. All these examples illustrate that Churchill avoids a focus on mere biological difference. Women may take up values generally considered to be masculine, while men can feel attracted towards feminine ones.

The women characters - Marion, occupying the public domain of business versus Lisa, confined within her home - are connected via Marion's ownership of the flat that Lisa and her family inhabit. Churchill complements Marion's greed and thirst for power with a husband who has reached resignation with regard to career aspirations. Clegg, nevertheless, finds it difficult to cope with his wife's success. Lured by the fantasy that he will eventually dominate his wife via sexual subordination, Clegg progresses through the play with a belief in the legitimacy of male chauvinism and misogyny. Eventually, it will not be Marion but Lisa whom Clegg succeeds in dominating sexually. Since Lisa is the wife of Alec - whom Marion is still in love with - possessing Lisa signifies the possession of something that 'belongs' to Marion's object of desire, and hence leads to Clegg's indirect victory over Marion. Marion longs for Alec, but also has a relationship - conducted mainly on business terms - with her aide.¹¹⁷ The strongest longing nevertheless is for succession, and for the transmission of one's fortune and name via the production of children. Ironically, it is only the couple who do not have much to transmit in material terms who are fertile. Clegg's vision of the 'Clegg and Son' chain of butcher's shops has proved to be a shattered dream, while Marion can only aim at a successor by acquisition. Offering a critique of utilitarian exploitation, Churchill highlights Lisa's and Alec's financial insecurity as the foundation of Marion's

blackmail. The couple's latest child becomes the object of a commercial exchange on terms and conditions imposed by Marion: they can remain in the flat provided they hand the new-born baby over to Marion and Clegg, who will raise it as their own.

As opposed to Lisa's family-centredness, Marion leads an independent life despite her marriage. Like most of the fictional career women discussed in this dissertation, she has concentrated on achieving success; a fact that can be translated into a certain willingness not to have or nurture children. However, surrogate parenting - via Marion's sudden interest in the baby - takes up a major section of the play. Marion considers herself a legitimate legal mother to the child, and the exchange a perfectly acceptable move, both morally and psychologically. Thus Churchill turns to an issue that subsequently became central in the ethics of adoption and surrogacy: Who is the real mother of a child? Is it the biological (birth) mother or the legal (adoptive) mother? Here Churchill presents Marion's failed attempt at surrogacy, arguing for the prevalence of the biological bond. Churchill also investigates the extent to which a human being can 'either possess his own life or control the lives of others'.¹¹⁸ In Marion's surrogate parenting, for instance, the component of care is non-existent. Her desire to acquire a child is fuelled by the economic necessity of having an heir, but also by her rivalry with Lisa. As Marion is unable to obtain Alec or have his child herself, she settles for second best: appropriating Lisa's baby. Through this latter exercise Marion is symbolically transformed into a substitute for Lisa, not merely as a surrogate mother to the latter's child but also as a surrogate partner to Alec.

The only character uninterested in possession is Alec. Even Lisa has moments when she is taken over by acquisitiveness; she is particularly upset after the

burglary of their house and tries with all her might to save the home she considers theirs. It is her quest to regain their child given up for adoption, however, that makes her dependent on her instinct for possession. Lisa desperately wants the very child she has lost in the uneven battle, partly owing to the operation of her maternal instinct, but also to the child's absence constantly reminding her of their inferior social status. As Elaine Aston observes,

'Owning' and buying babies is a class and gender issue: economic privilege empowers one class of mothers and fathers to buy: economic deprivation encourages disempowered mothers to sell. Lisa, as Churchill's dramatic representation of the economically deprived birth mother is, therefore, as much a victim of her class as of her gender.¹¹⁹

Alec's most striking contrast nevertheless is with Marion; emphasised by the opposition of the Christian hymn ('Onward Christian Soldiers, / Marching as to war.') and Zen poem (Sitting quietly, doing nothing, / Spring comes and the grass grows by itself.) with which Churchill prefaces the published play. Though Marion cannot fully perceive Alec's lack of desire, he is the man she really longs for, precisely because her only pathway for cognition is via possession.

Unable to either turn down or respond to Marion, Alec nevertheless yields to her; a passiveness replicated in his exercise of fatherhood. However, when Lisa is reluctant to assure the neighbour that she will look after her baby, Alec volunteers to do so. In the final scene it is this same baby that he returns to rescue from the fire, risking and eventually losing his life. Martin Esslin interpreted this gesture as a pointer towards a 'philosophy of love through sacrifice' and towards a 'higher order of love than the striving for mere possession of the other person'.¹²⁰ In fact, what Alec argues for is a certain need for content in life - other than material accumulation - and the way he retains his moral integrity is via the refusal of societal conventions.

However, for the rest of the characters 'the law is based on property rather than on morals'.¹²¹ Originally stemming from Churchill's preoccupation with the connections between Western individualism, Christianity and the puritan idea of work as a virtue, the play moves on to the examination of ownership and control. Churchill conveys a particularly bleak vision of society in which the predominant value is possession, centred in Marion's hands. However, opinions about whether Marion is or is not an icon of female empowerment have been divided. Michelene Wandor contended that power had actually de-sexed Marion, both literally (she is sterile) and symbolically (she is active and powerful, features conventionally associated with masculinity). Wandor also noted that Marion - despite acting as a 'tribute to the potential of female power' - validated 'male fears of female sexual power'¹²² and, in this respect, alluded to Ann Jellicoe's character, Greta, in *The Sport of My Mad Mother*.

The play alternates abruptly in style between naturalistic elements and grotesque moments, recalling Joe Orton's influence, especially in the case of Worsely.¹²³ Worsely is obsessed with self-mutilation, each time appearing with fresh layers of bandages: testimonies to his failed suicidal attempts. His obsession is rooted in the belief that all that he certainly owns is his body, suicide triggering the ultimate form of ownership. While he does not manage to take absolute possession of his body, he succeeds in being destructive towards others (he forces Lisa and Alec to move out and sets the house on fire). His only attempt at what might be called a humanitarian gesture in naturalistic drama, occurs when he returns the baby from Marion to Lisa, prioritising the biological mother-infant bond: 'It is not your baby, Marion, by any stretch of imagination'.¹²⁴ By this stage in the plot, ownership has been scrutinised so much that the mere re-utterance of the word 'belong' generates a

sense of unease; even in the context of returning the child to the family that is genuinely prepared to care for him.¹²⁵ The return of the baby by the person who engineered its loss - and that of Lisa's and Alec's home - underlines even more firmly that 'Both building and baby [are] equivalent forms of real estate in a competitive system, where the value of possessions is the power they confer over others'.¹²⁶

The final scene establishes Marion as the ultimate victor, as her materialist individualism is set most strikingly against the misery of the others. The fire triggers the tragic death of the disputed baby and leaves Lisa and Alec without a home, yet for Marion it connotes achievement. Her claim that 'I never knew I could do a thing like that. I might be capable of anything. I'm just beginning to find out what's possible',¹²⁷ strengthens her position as a hard-liner and institutes her as an icon of bourgeois feminism. Lisa, on the other hand, is gradually entangled in the status of victim. Duplicating her economic and sexual exploitation, the most dramatic aspect of her victimisation follows the moment of giving birth. Witnessing the continuation of the affair between Alec and Marion she is the one who offers the baby to Marion; however her legal co-operation is coerced when she is still under the influence of anaesthetics:

WORSELY: Sign here.

LISA: After can I see the baby?

WORSELY: Don't drip all over the paper.

LISA: I want to see he's all right.

MARION: Of course he is.

LISA: Because later when I'm better I'll have him back.

WORSELY: He's very well taken care of. I wouldn't lie.

*Lisa signs the paper.*¹²⁸

Churchill thus emphasises the unequal Lisa versus Marion power relation, an inequality also confirmed on a societal level by psychologist Phyllis Chesler:

What else but 'duress' to obtain a birth mother's signature by offering her hospital care or money when she's about to go into labour or has literally just given birth: when she's experiencing the most stressful moment of her life; when she has no legal advice, no job or housing or prospects [...]. Most adoption papers are signed under 'duress' and most should therefore be considered illegal.¹²⁹

Some of the highly publicised surrogacy and adoption cases in the 1980s equally revealed a lack of balance in the economic backgrounds of the participating parties, thus revealing the prophetic nature of Churchill's work. Both in the Baby M case in America and the Baby Cotton case in Britain a clearly underprivileged mother offered to gestate and give birth to a baby and then hand it over to the infertile, yet financially more established couple. The controversy arose in the above cases from the birth mother's reluctance to hand the baby over according to the terms of the contract. The mothers felt that the agreements were drawn without their being fully aware of the psychological consequences and, hence, were arguing a case against the adoptions.

Unlike Lisa, who wants *her* own baby and none other, unlike Clegg, who needs a son to inherit his business, and unlike Marion, who wants to possess the baby as a part of Alec, Alec does not show any interest in the ownership of a specific child. For him, the entire traditional politics of fatherhood based on the necessity of producing a male heir in order to transmit name and fortune is devoid of meaning. He is prepared to care just as much for anyone else's child. When he returns to the burning house to rescue the neighbours' baby, ownership is the last thing he is concerned with. He performs a profoundly humanistic yet incidental gesture, simply offering the baby a chance for life. This idea of a chance for life also connects with Churchill's personal experience of motherhood, as her work on the play was interrupted by a sudden miscarriage:

I wrote it in three days. I'd just come out of hospital after a particularly gruesome late miscarriage. [...] Into it went for the first time a lot of things that had been building up in me over a long time, political attitudes as well as personal ones.¹³⁰

Thus, Churchill's own loss of a child was sublimated into the creation of a dramatic piece through the lens of her politicisation of the personal. Immediate experience fuelled her gradual identification with feminism, enabling her to switch from defining herself as a 'writer' to a 'feminist writer'.¹³¹

Despite the ten-year gap between *Owners* and *Top Girls* the correspondences between the characters of Marion and Marlene are prophetic. Marion demonstrated as early as 1972 that 'The capitalist impulse [was] not determined by the biological difference between male and female',¹³² while a reviewer talking about the 1987 revival of *Owners*, was startled by the parallels between the aggressive female real estate developer in the play and Thatcher. According to John Vidal, through this correspondence the play 'has become starkly relevant, whereas once it was more a philosophical debate on the nature of individual power-sharing'.¹³³ In fact, the character of Marion works as a study towards the figure of Marlene. Although Marion is driven by an impulse for domination from the very beginning, she is unable to fully control her own image.¹³⁴ Marion needs the shelter of anonymity, relying on a male aide who acts on her behalf and leaves her identity hidden from the public eye. At an early stage in the play she refers to herself as a man of destiny, suggesting not only that she is prepared to go beyond gender stereotypes but also that she has a long-term career-plan.

This statement can also be interpreted as Churchill's coded rejection of female equality in a capitalist system because it 'transforms women into surrogate men',¹³⁵ an issue that has constituted a key area of preoccupation for the playwright ever since. Both Marion and Marlene are icons of bourgeois liberal feminism.¹³⁶

They are women who aim at minimising the difference between the sexes, who achieve success exclusively in the system, and for whom the concerns of the individual categorically prevail over those of the group.¹³⁷ Indeed, after overcoming her illness (itself a symptom of her initial inability to follow her career) and the surveillance of her husband, Marion's approach to business is just as unscrupulous as Marlene's. Leaving family behind is a common feature between them; but while Marlene does this literally, by abandoning her daughter and sister, Marion does it only symbolically, by ignoring Clegg.

For Marlene, the mandatory price of success is the rejection of motherhood together with her former life, geographical mobility allowing her a symbolic re-birth, free of attachments. Marion does not need to escape her geographical setting as long as she has the upper hand in her marriage. In fact, dominating her husband constitutes a constant source of satisfaction for her. She does not need to leave children behind either, as she has none: being either on the pill (according to Worsely) or infertile (according to Clegg). Clegg's obsessive desire for a son is of no concern to her, until the opportunity arises for the fulfilment of her own obsession too. She does not adopt Lisa's and Alec's baby to finally provide Clegg with an heir. Her real aim is to possess Alec. Unable to 'keep' Alec in any other way, she hopes that 'owning' his child will act as the nearest substitute. Marion's interest in the baby, therefore, does not come from a desire for parenting; hence she never becomes a genuine surrogate mother the way Clegg instantly becomes a surrogate father. For her, the baby acts as a surrogate for Alec, in a metonymic relationship that substitutes a representative unit for the absent whole.

Top Girls not only confirms Churchill's prophetic vision in *Owners*¹³⁸ but also engages with similar dilemmas as Gems's *Queen Christina*. Utilising the device

of historical parable, both latter plays investigate the negotiation of motherhood from the perspective of career women. *Gems* offers an accurate image of the seventeenth-century Swedish Queen, while Churchill presents an encounter of apparently random characters drawn from history, fiction and painting - in a surrealistic opening tableau that recalls Judy Chicago's installation, 'The Dinner Party'.¹³⁹ For Churchill it is not historical accuracy that prevails as her characters gather at Marlene's dinner table; their presence is legitimised by their contribution to a tradition in transgressive femininity. Her mixture of fictional and real characters is intended to warn the audience that our view is largely constituted through 'unchallenged assumptions about the way things are'.¹⁴⁰ While *Gems* unfolds Christina's story in a linear narrative, Churchill disrupts the chronological sequence of events, focusing on the cyclical nature of women's time. Recalling Julia Kristeva's influential essay,¹⁴¹ Churchill's understanding of time equally interrogates the linearity of history. The latter perception of time has been associated with patriarchy and the perpetuation of masculine supremacy, consequently its re-assessment is adamant in order to put across a feminist intervention. Female subjectivity - connected to the repetitiveness of physiological cycles - has more to do with what Kristeva terms monumentality and eternity and, hence, cannot be forced under the constraint of time as a progressive project. It associates fluidity and re-enactment, avoiding a single climax. By denying chronological presentation to any of her acts and scenes, Churchill denies emphasis to any particular moment in the plot as the ultimate outcome, stressing the idea of interconnectedness.

The strategies Churchill uses in *Top Girls* evoke the experimental and radical feminist theatre of the late sixties and seventies, including a certain preoccupation with the didactic. The play features an all-female cast in which cast members (apart

from the actress playing Marlene) play two, sometimes even three roles, thus suggesting (despite Churchill's critique of class and intra-gender oppression) the interconnected nature of women's experience. This device also allows the audience to 'enjoy the medium and appreciate [its] theatricality rather than over-identifying with the characters'.¹⁴² On the occasion of the 1991 revival, however, Churchill warned against extended emphasis on particular ways of doubling. Unlike *Cloud Nine*, which was deliberately written to be doubled,¹⁴³ in *Top Girls* this is just an extra dimension and there are no prescribed ways of handling it. The sheer fact of one actress playing several roles, nevertheless, connotes the multiplicity of experiences and ideological stances, also encountered by Queen Christina. However, in Christina's case the doubling between sex and gender fails to work out, Gems arguing against such a schizophrenic split. In *Top Girls*, splitting of a kind does work out, as the juxtaposition of the three acts invites and legitimises a comparative analysis. The first act - written in a consistent break with the conventions of realism - is set in contrast with the following two acts - presenting scenes from everyday life - dissolving the boundaries between myth and reality. There is also the theme of success; as will be seen, the diners and their hostess are chosen by Churchill for their own claims to fame in conditions hostile to female emancipation.

This preoccupation with success became particularly characteristic of the eighties and of the emerging trend of individualism. Unlike the feminism of the seventies which was dominated by the 'tyranny of structurelessness'¹⁴⁴ - arguing for non-hierarchical and consensual modes of organisation¹⁴⁵ - the eighties were legendary for prioritising opportunism, individual decision-taking and independent careers. Whereas *Queen Christina* was produced in 1977, towards the end of the Labour government's term in office, Churchill's 1982 play responded to the return of

Conservative leadership and the rise of Margaret Thatcher's political career. Churchill's central character, Marlene, obsessively aims at embodying a convincing Thatcherite from the very first scene. She is a woman solely interested in the advancement of her own career, at any price, including the lack of concern for anybody else's feelings.

It is the presentations offered by the guests - invited to celebrate Marlene's promotion to managing director of the 'Top Girls' employment agency - that set up a context for her achievements. However, this 'dramatic genealogy of Marlene's historical community'¹⁴⁶ gradually builds up a picture that contains compromises alongside images of glory, just as Marlene's success will be revealed as rooted in intra-gender oppression, and ultimately, in the oppression of capitalism. Thus, Marlene can be read not only as an outstanding achiever but also as victim and victimiser, the latter two capacities being interdependent and to a great extent imposed by the competitive ethics of the capitalist system. In fact, Marlene's success is appreciated as a positive phenomenon only within a 'market-driven sphere'.¹⁴⁷

The fact that she invites figures from the past emphasises not merely her lack of personal relationships but also her uniqueness as a successful woman: 'The dream of the past reminds us not only of the historical weight of women's oppression but also of the futility of individual solutions'.¹⁴⁸ Marlene has appropriated masculine values in business to the extent that she organises her party not at home but at the aptly named 'La Prima Donna' restaurant, the traditional location for business networking. As the juxtaposition of the guests' accounts unveils, most of their achievements (apart from Gret's) are linked to some form of submissiveness to men, in the shape of tolerance to either psychological battering or (physical) rape. The correspondences between the lives of the various women only demonstrate, in fact,

that 'the changes in the position of women have been superficial: literally a question of costume'.¹⁴⁹ Though all the characters are female, the 'top girls' 'replicate the exploitation of their sex', thus twisting the title towards irony.¹⁵⁰ Some of the women, like Isabella or Pope Joan, reached fame by assuming roles so-far-reserved for men, others, like Nijo or Griselda, did so by emphasising their archetypal feminine qualities, and hence by encouraging conformity to male expectations.

Isabella, Joan and Nijo are based on historical figures, while Gret and Griselda are fictional, invented by a male imagination. However, the latter two represent contradictory stances: Gret advocating a radical, non-compromising feminism as opposed to Griselda's essentialist standpoint. Isabella and Joan - who are the closest to Marlene - opt for an equality-feminism, finding satisfaction in achievements normally licensed to men. Joan also shares with Marlene the obsession with dominance, as well as the lack of ease with regard to pregnancy. In Joan's case the female body is also concealed under male costume, a metonymy for her cultural invisibility as a female subject. In fact, Joan's 'inability to recognise the reality of pregnancy mirrors Marlene's refusal to acknowledge that the "truth" of her womanhood cannot be articulated within a male-produced discourse'.¹⁵¹

The least vocal character (apart from her outburst at the end of the scene) is Dull Gret, pictured by Brueghel leading a bunch of peasant women to assault hell. Her fight is undertaken not for personal advancement but for the benefit of the community. She identifies with women from her class and time, unlike the other guests who are captured as individuals. Gret gives the least evidence of submission to patriarchal domination by comparison with the others whose lives have been shaped by imitation of or obedience to a male individual or a masculine-identified ideology. An outsider to the party as a silent witness and in terms of status - like the

waitress - Gret's presence suggests from the very beginning that the sense of community envisaged by Marlene as a background to her success is an imaginary construct. Gret's silence, therefore, acts as a metaphoric protest against Marlene's attempts at legitimising her individual success in a male world. Uncomfortable at this staged reunion of contributors to a female tradition in achievement, Gret is, in fact, closer to the experiences of women excluded from the celebration. Like the waitress, she can be seen to 'personify in mythic fashion the stance represented by Marlene's sister, Joyce',¹⁵² thereby connecting to the forthcoming sections, rooted in realism.

Another connection between Gret and Joyce - and Lisa in *Owners* - is their intertextuality with Grusha in Brecht's 1945 play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*,¹⁵³ a key play in the left-wing theatre repertoire of the 1970s. Grusha, like Joyce, raises the child of another woman belonging to a higher social class, without the latter acknowledging her efforts. In fact, both Joyce and Grusha are exiled to the margins of the social spectrum, not only as a result of their class but also of choosing to be single mothers. While Marlene never lays claims to Angie (her daughter raised by Joyce), Grusha finds herself confronted by the biological mother of the child. Eventually, following a trial, she is allowed to keep the child, as she has convincingly demonstrated that her love is stronger than her desire for ownership. Grusha's decision to raise the baby against all odds, however, is not just a statement for the viability of surrogate bonds and for her legitimisation as the archetypal surrogate mother, but also a profoundly antiauthoritarian gesture, like Gret's rebellion. For both Grusha and Gret, risk-taking is potentially fatal, yet it is their only means of questioning social hierarchies and compensating for their exclusion.

Gret is also connected to Angie via their rebellions. They display the same intensity of outburst after extended silence and speak intuitively. While Gret leads an army of women in battle, Angie's protest is only mapped out symbolically and is directed against Joyce, whom she perceives as the bad, denying and constraining mother. Apart from Angie's psychoanalytically motivated desire to kill Joyce, it is the menstrual blood-tasting episode that epitomises her transgression, as a moment that revisits feminist celebratory rites. It is also significant that she involves her friend Kit in this ritual. This detail transforms Angie into the only genuinely feminist character in the play, in the sense of having understood the importance of female community.¹⁵⁴ Since Joyce only theoretically embraces socialism and never does anything concrete to change her situation, she is positioned, in fact, to emphasise the impossibility of her achieving change. Whilst in this manner Churchill locates Joyce as a counter-figure to Gret's rebellion,¹⁵⁵ she also voices her socialist-feminist inspired reservation with regard to the possibility of accomplishing change exclusively on an individual basis.

Though brought together by comparable experiences, the six diners only incidentally listen to each other or engage in actual conversation. Their respective definitions of 'success' are so divergent that the very 'image of "top girls" quickly becomes diffuse'.¹⁵⁶ In Quigley's words, 'their collective representativeness justifies their presence at the party', but 'their individual presences serve only to raise questions about what they collectively represent'.¹⁵⁷ Mostly they interrupt each other or introduce a new topic while the other still has not finished her sentence.¹⁵⁸ As the scene progresses, it becomes obvious that Churchill's aim is not to present a group of friends but to emphasise the lack of unity between them, as their overlapping speeches 'fracture the language of the individual subject into near-cacophonous

vocalizations'.¹⁵⁹ In opposition to the sociolinguistic theory of Deborah Tannen and Jennifer Coates,¹⁶⁰ the women featured by Churchill do not listen to each other and fail to draw any constructive conclusions from the body of experience language brings to the fore. Not only are these women incapable of genuine female friendships, but they are also unable to function outside the regime imposed by patriarchal relations. Elin Diamond offers a psychoanalytic analysis of the dinner scene, emphasising the failed attempt of the five women to exit from, or even to produce a radical critique of the Symbolic Order. She writes:

The five 'top girls' eating and drinking together in an expensive London restaurant have entered Western representation, but at a cost. Each points to the elaborate historical text that covers her body - Nijo in geisha silks, Joan in regal papal robes - but their fragmented speeches, the effect of the words of one being spoken through and over words of another, refer to need, violence, loss and pain, to a body unable to signify within those texts.¹⁶¹

Churchill also signals the lack of ideological unity between the women, as they come from different social backgrounds. None of the guests pay the slightest attention to the silent waitress either, as they only acknowledge her presence from a strictly utilitarian perspective. Same-sex consensus, thus, operates with considerable limits according to Churchill, and it fails unless doubled up by class unity.

Abandoned in the hyperbolic chaos at the close of Act One when the party transforms into a revelation of personal frustrations, the issue of class returns as the crux of the forthcoming two acts. The pivotal character in Churchill's analysis of class relations is Marlene's working-class sister, Joyce. In opposition to Marlene Joyce has remained in the country, leading the life women in their family have traditionally lived. Churchill captures the stark working-class realities in the scenes dedicated to Joyce and to Marlene's oppression of her sister, a theme she subsequently returned to in *Fen* (1983)¹⁶² where she examined violent power

conflicts between women (a gang of women versus their female supervisor, stepmother versus step-daughter). In *F'en* Churchill also highlights the amazing power of superstition and religious fanaticism, portraying a world suspended in time, still governed by quasi-ancestral mentalities.

It is the countryside of the Fens, the suffocating gritty world, that women like Marlene are passionately trying to escape from. There would be no contact between Marlene and Joyce in *Top Girls* were it not for the dialogue set up by the adolescent Angie. She appears as the archetypal outsider: underage, intellectually handicapped and apparently uninterested in anything. Despite being Marlene's daughter Angie is raised by Joyce as her own child. Joyce was married at the time of Angie's birth, whereas Marlene was single and already planning her quest for autonomy.

Triumph for Marlene, thus, is only achievable at the expense of silencing her motherhood, as occupying a position of power for a woman leads to a complete erasure of parenting. When confronted by the archetypal family woman, Mrs Kidd, whose husband Marlene has beaten in the quest for promotion, the same mutual exclusion between the private and public comes to the fore:

MRS KIDD: You're one of these ballbreakers/ that's what you are. You'll end up [...] miserable and lonely. You're not natural.¹⁶³

This encounter between two women representing opposing principles seizes on the limitations inherent in both the stereotype of the past (the passive, dependent housewife Mrs. Kidd) and the prototype of the future (the active, successful but unattached Marlene).¹⁶⁴ Both types operate on an 'either [...] or [...]' basis, unable to deconstruct the dichotomy they are caught in. Throughout Act One, Marlene listens to her guests' tales of lost children without the slightest hint of identification,

highlighting that her success was engineered not only via her suppression of maternal instinct but also via her disregard of genuine human feeling and of moral values.

Marlene, in fact, is a selfish individualist who has achieved a career only due to favourable circumstances. Without Joyce's adoption of Angie she could not have led an independent life, a fact that she has never acknowledged. Marlene's brand of bourgeois feminism - entirely comfortable with same-sex exploitation - finds a powerful role model in Thatcher. Thatcher's major attraction for Marlene is the achievement of success in a male-dominated world, though Marlene subsequently becomes a supporter of Thatcher's economic policies as well. According to Frank Rich, for Marlene it is 'the ability to make it by male success standards [that] is the only criterion of female worth', a fact that indirectly transforms her into 'a male oppressor'.¹⁶⁵

MARLENE: She's a tough lady, Maggie. I'd give her a job. ...

JOYCE: You voted for them, did you?

MARLENE: [...] Monetarism is not stupid. [...]

JOYCE: Well I think they're filthy bastards.

MARLENE: who's got to drive it on? First woman prime minister. Terrifico. Aces. Right on. / You must admit. Certainly gets my vote.

JOYCE: What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms. Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina. / Great adventures.

MARLENE: Bosses still walking on the workers' faces? Still Dadda's little parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself? I believe in the individual.¹⁶⁶

The Thatcher-Marlene parallel can be amplified further via Angela Neustatter's description of Thatcher. Both display 'the characteristics feminists have seen and struggled against so long in men - a deep contempt for women', and give 'the impression of aligning [themselves] with male perspectives, behaviour, power structures'. If they 'can be called a feminist by dint of what [they have] achieved it makes a mockery of a word which embraces in its meaning support for other women'.¹⁶⁷

Joyce's heartfelt hatred of the Thatcher government, culminating in the mock-hyperbolic 'Hitlerina' label, epitomised the overall disowning of Thatcher by the mainly socialist-oriented women's movement. By the 1990s, however, a re-evaluation of Thatcher both as a political leader and a role model for women has been initiated. She was not only Britain's first woman Prime Minister but also the only party leader in the twentieth century to win three consecutive elections. Her name has been encapsulated into a political doctrine, her self has been transformed into 'a robust political persona',¹⁶⁸ while the tabloid press has proclaimed her the new incarnation of Britannia. In Roy Hattersley's words:

Margaret Thatcher [...] honestly believed that she was leading a crusade for national regeneration. And in the holy war which was to make Britain strong and free, there was no time to weep for inevitable casualties.¹⁶⁹

Hall posits the 'translation of a theoretical *ideology* into populist *idiom*'¹⁷⁰ as the main achievement of Thatcherism on the political terrain. Despite her personal unpopularity¹⁷¹ some of her economic policies proved particularly popular,¹⁷² including certain aspects of privatisation, the rise in home ownership and lower direct taxes. Tony Blair was the first Labour leader to acknowledge Thatcher's economic revolution, to which he posited himself as a 'natural heir'.¹⁷³ November 2000, however, witnessed the acrimonious end of this mutually flattering relationship, Blair claiming that 'we are in a new era' and 'it is time we move British politics beyond the time of Margaret Thatcher'.¹⁷⁴

Natasha Walter's 1998 feminist rehabilitation of Thatcher¹⁷⁵ focused on the intersection of issues of gender with economics and class. She highlighted her normalisation of female success, her transgression of class and gender barriers in order to achieve her goal, her launching of the concept of the 'different-but-equal' powerful woman, as well as the mixture of masculine and feminine traits in her

physical appearance. Walter quotes Oona King, the second black British woman to become an MP, who contends:

I don't care if Margaret Thatcher was the devil, it meant so much to me that I was growing up when two women - she and the Queen - were running the country.¹⁷⁶

Despite her constant references to her experience as a woman,¹⁷⁷ Thatcher was often labelled as 'a man', her success being viewed as non-representative for average women. Joyce, for instance, is a single mother forced to do cleaning work to make ends meet. For Marlene, however, Joyce's sacrifice seems to be perfectly acceptable in order for her to achieve success. Her justification uncannily resembles that of Howard Kidd, who keeps his 'traditional' wife at home while he builds a career in the office. Thus, the 'ethic of competition', advocated by Marlene, is irrevocably opposed to and only achieved at the expense of the 'ethics of caring',¹⁷⁸ represented by Joyce and Mrs. Kidd.

Marlene is equally unconcerned about her daughter; Angie's fascination with Marlene is clearly not reciprocated. Her assessment of Angie - she will end up a 'packer in Tesco' - translates into the predication that she 'will not make it',¹⁷⁹ a conclusion she often draws when assessing job applications.¹⁸⁰ By presenting Angie's case Churchill raises the importance of society's responsibility for the have-nots. Unable to act as her own agent, Angie turns into a symbolic site of controversy for opposing political and ethical stances. Resisting overt judgement, Churchill creates a balance by emphasising the conflict between the sisters, as well as by getting both to assume full responsibility for their existential choices. The dilemma between a career and raising a child, therefore, is mapped out rather than solved. Churchill makes the point, however, that Joyce is motivated by a profound sense of duty, whereas Marlene has deliberately opted out from family responsibility. Joyce is

equally aware of Angie's inability to compete, but her stance is one of concern, rooted in affection. She reminds Marlene that it is the likes of Angie who are most exposed to the effects of monetarism and increasing class inequalities. Marlene, however, is a 'meritocrat', a believer in privileges not so much inherited but achieved through personal efforts: 'I don't believe in class. Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes'.¹⁸¹ Thus, Churchill prefigured Thatcher's (in)famous comment on the non-existence of society: 'We don't belong to society, we are all just individuals doing the best we can for ourselves.'¹⁸²

Though Angie is present in most scenes of the second and third acts, there are few insights into her perspective. Churchill suggests that she is uninterested in school and still likes to play in her teenage years, but also that she did not develop a satisfactory relationship with Joyce and defies her in petty day-to-day incidents. The first reference to any form of agency is her desire to get in touch with her supposed aunt wished-to-be her mother,¹⁸³ whom she phones and visits in her office. The latter especially, a contemporary, demythologised version of a journey to somewhere distant in pursuit of a tempting goal, is a particularly significant transgressive action for Angie given that she has hardly done anything out of her own initiative. Despite her fear of the future, the power of seduction is stronger and she yields to the urge of biology that claims the retrieval of her mother. The glamour surrounding Marlene is also a temptation-cum-fake ideal, something Angie believes she too can have access to. In this respect she recalls Queen Christina, who is also confronted by the deceptiveness of a central yet unachievable bogus ideal. At the end, Christina acknowledges that she cannot bear children, whereas Angie is forced to confront the fact that her aspiration towards Marlene's lifestyle is going to remain outside her reach.

Churchill returns to Angie in the next act, which, in fact, chronologically precedes both the others. In the last line of the play, Angie addresses to Marlene her most clearly articulated statement rooted in some kind of understanding of her circumstances: 'Frightening'.¹⁸⁴ It is not accidental that Pope Joan's last word in the dinner scene is also the Latin term ('terrorcm') for 'frightening'. This repetition connects the most handicapped character with the one who has excelled through her intellect. Thus, Churchill contributes yet another parallel between the historical-surrealist opening and the realistic sections, but also offers solid and uncontested support to Angie's call for help.¹⁸⁵

Angie's call, in fact, is not an isolated moment. The previous scene, which features Angie at a later time, conveys her desire to kill Joyce, whom we then still believe to be her mother. She also manifests an attraction towards things traditionally associated to the concept of pollution, like menstrual blood or vomit. Both of these statements have the capacity of challenging long-held traditional taboos in Western culture, and act as further pathways for transgression through which Angie can emphasise her symbolic resistance towards societal norms. However, her final cry of despair is ambivalent, opening up a multitude of possible explanations. It might have been merely triggered by a nightmare, but it may equally be the result of her so-far-repressed awareness of her biological mother's individualism.¹⁸⁶ It may also be generated by her sudden sense of isolation or the consequence of her emerging uncertainties about the bleak perspective of her own future.¹⁸⁷ Whether 'unwilling or unable to enter Marlene's web of monetarist discourse',¹⁸⁸ Angie unconsciously realises that there are very few options left for her as far as future opportunities are concerned, and that, in a sense, her life will be at the mercy of people like Marlene. Angie's lack of eloquence might also be read as a direct reference to her inability to

adapt to the trendy language of monetarism and capitalism propagated by Marlene and Conservatism, in spite of her attempt to join Marlene both in private (as a daughter) and in public (at her workplace). Despite her repeated endeavours at re-establishing the bond with her birth mother, she fails to tune in to Marlene's point of view and unconsciously reiterates Joyce. Thus, she ends up emphasising the viability of surrogate maternal links above biological ones, even if all she is genuinely aware of is a sense of confusion and discomfort. Angie's desperate outbreak at the end might also be interpreted as metaphoric for the difficulties feminism encounters, as a result of critiques from other discourses.

Despite Angie's outburst, Marlene enacts the abandonment of her daughter once again. Perhaps triggered by instinct, Angie repeatedly addresses her as 'mother' on this occasion, but Marlene invariably informs her that her mother is Joyce. Thus, the play's final tableau simultaneously conveys several dimensions of failure in human interaction. It does not feature only a child rejected by an adult, a daughter unwanted by her mother, but also an unsuccessful person turned down by a successful individual. The close-up is on one woman rejecting another, thus capturing 'an image not of achieved, but of aborted community'.¹⁸⁹ Marlene rejects Angie, yet she insists on the irrelevance of class:

MARLENE: *Then, them. / Us and them?*

JOYCE: And *you're* one of *them*.

MARLENE: And *you're us*, wonderful *us*, and Angie's *us* / and Mum and Dad's *us*.

JOYCE: Yes, that's right, and *you're them*.¹⁹⁰

Joyce's refusal to include Marlene in the same social category as herself is a belated response to Marlene's original abandonment of class and family roots. Their dialogue recalls Thatcher's double standards, as in public she would insist on the unifying 'We' - denying the existence of a confrontational 'Us' versus 'Them' -

whereas in private she would perpetuate the division of the political world. 'One of us' was the way she referred to her allies - also known as the 'Dries' - while those she could not rely on were labelled 'Them' or the 'Wets'.¹⁹¹

With Joyce's protest Churchill questions not only the Conservative politics of the eighties but also challenges the legitimacy of bourgeois-equality feminism.¹⁹² Lou Wakefield, the actress who played Kit and the waitress in the original Royal Court production, contended:

Some women are succeeding and getting on very well, but it's no good if feminism means that women get on and tread on men's heads, or other women's heads, as hard as men ever tread on theirs.¹⁹³

Taking a stance on the redefinition of feminism, she added: 'This is a feminist play in that it's self-criticism of the women's movement.' 'If women do get the top jobs, there's also a job to be done in reassessing that job in feminist or humanitarian terms'.¹⁹⁴ Janet Brown formulated a more precise reading in terms of a potential feminist intervention. In her view, Joyce and Gret acted as heralds of the so-called 'next wave' in the Women's Movement, intended to fight towards the elimination of oppression via direct struggle.¹⁹⁵ Churchill was not that optimistic. She acknowledged the need for a feminist and socialist intervention, but also forecast the inadequacies and subsequent failures of the Left by stressing Joyce's inertia.

Churchill warned of an imminent backlash inherent in the pursuit of illusory freedom and success achieved on exclusively male terms. Marlene's - but also Thatcher's - success can mainly be registered as an individual case that did not contribute sufficiently to the alteration of the average woman's life. Having a female Prime Minister certainly created a precedent but has not really opened up wide-scale avenues for public careers for British women, and has not provided for women who fail to find employment, like Angie. A process has been initiated but the Women's

Liberation Movement has contributed far more towards the consciousness-raising of both sexes than the three terms in office of a one-off woman Prime Minister. Churchill does not argue against the need for women's assumption of public roles. What she warns against is the assimilative approach, the superficial belief that a few token women in key positions can entail genuine breakthrough.

Instead of Marlene's hierarchical model of success based on the principle of 'power over others', Churchill makes a case for accomplishing empowerment from within, in order to 'perform some social action'.¹⁹⁶ Aiming to unsettle and challenge the audience to address the issues discussed in the play after the performance, Churchill included no obvious solution and no 'real' feminist character in the play:

I quite deliberately left a hole in the play, rather than giving people a model of what they could be like. I meant the thing that is absent to have a presence in the play.¹⁹⁷

In fact, Churchill has claimed not to write 'vehicles for issues about women (or whatever)' and to hate 'being a "woman writer"', it makes a horrible sub-compartment'.¹⁹⁸ She has found questions enquiring into the ideological nature of her writing rather irrelevant, as her plays go beyond ideology and 'are much more playful than that'.¹⁹⁹ Like Jellicoe, Churchill has constantly offered radically new theatrical forms and experiences. Apart from her trademark overlapping dialogue, she liberated the dynamic of plot by disrupting the chronological sequence of events and by creating a sense of cyclical patterning and interconnectedness. In *Top Girls* the three acts united by Marlene can also be seen as three quasi-independent short pieces that convey different perspectives on the theme of success. Churchill also juxtaposes many techniques and genres from mainstream theatre - from naturalistic domestic drama to surreal fantasy - resulting in an entirely fresh and anti-authoritarian commentary on reality.

3.4 Conclusions

Perhaps the most traditional aspect of these plays is constituted by the fact that, underlying the fertility of invention, both playwrights focus on a defining choice; and the crucial (almost tragic) choice in both cases involves an individual's acceptance or rejection of the biological fact of motherhood. Focusing on professionally active women's options for mothering, both Gems and Churchill highlight the difficulties experienced by those wishing to combine the public and the private. In fact, not only do both playwrights emphasise the pitfalls of such an attempt in the seventies and early eighties, but they also warn of the unavoidable compromise a woman had to make - whatever her history - when opting for either possibility. For neither Gems's Queen Christina nor Churchill's Marion or Marlene is public self-fulfilment compatible with a traditional private life.

Queen Christina, raised according to masculine norms refuses to desire marriage and children. She is content as a supreme ruler, leading crusades and involved in intellectual debates until forced to abandon her so-far-acclaimed 'masculinity' and produce an heir. When confronted with this split between her sex and her constructed masculinity, she refuses the masquerade, abdicates from the throne and embarks on an exploration of gender and sexual identities. But, having experimented with a wide range of feminist attitudes and sexual encounters, Christina suddenly finds herself discovering womanhood, something she has never previously been interested in. Gradually identifying with the fate of women across class barriers, she becomes aware of the compromise she was forced to make - to give up her femininity and mothering potential for the throne. Her profound regret transforms her into a quasi-hysterical rebel who projects her frustration into a

metaphoric battering of the oppressor, but also into a symbolic metamorphosis into a childhood, and thus unadulterated, self.

Marion, Churchill's pre-Thatcherite protagonist, is very different: a property developer obsessed by ownership who relates to everything in terms of property. Yet so far she too has not been interested in the value of children. As soon as she encounters her former lover, Alec, however, she radically changes. Alec is not interested in resuming their relationship, so the only pathway available to Marion is the acquisition of a surrogate for him. This will consist of Alec's and Lisa's new baby, as a result of a deal between the two women. In her jealousy, Lisa does not want Alec's child any longer, whereas Marion does whatever she can to prevent Lisa from having yet another dimension of Alec. For Marion, the baby will stand in metonymically for Alec, although she shares it with her husband, allowing him to continue his father-son fantasies. Marion fails to enjoy surrogate parenting owing to her incapacity for caring, but eventually, despite being deprived of possession on multiple levels she emerges as an uncontested victor: she discovers that it is the loss experienced by others that generates her ultimate sense of ownership.

Churchill's actual Thatcherite protagonist, Marlene - forecast in a visionary fashion by Marion - enacts a quest for power that is not imposed by her background, as was Christina's, but constitutes an escape from a bleak working-class milieu. Also unlike Christina, Marlene does give birth, though she instantly transfers the child to her sister, Joyce. The two sisters lead their lives without much contact from then on: Marlene becoming successful in her career and in identifying with bourgeois feminist values, while Joyce, facing economic hardship, develops a socialist stance. In the meantime, Angie, Marlene's biological daughter reaches adolescence and shows signs of a mental handicap. When they eventually meet Marlene concludes

that Angie will not 'make it', without expressing the slightest involvement. Joyce is also aware of Angie's difficulties, but her attitude is one of genuine concern. Confronting two types of motherhood, Churchill makes a case for the viability of surrogate links as opposed to biological ones. Marlene's abandonment of Angie is ethically flawed not just because she disregards her daughter, but also because she constructs her success on the exploitation of her sister. While offering a socialist critique of Thatcherism and bourgeois feminism, Churchill warns of the difficulties of assuming a public career while being a mother. She dwells on the mutual exclusion of most professional careers and parenting, not only through Marlene, but also via Joyce who could not leave home because she had to care for Angie. The same idea is reinforced in reverse via the women in the opening scene, as all have given up mothering for a vocation. Like *Gems*, Churchill also displays an array of feminist stances, from bourgeois-egalitarian, to radical and socialist. Though non-affiliated to any ideology, the most genuine feminist character in *Top Girls*, however, is Angie. Angie understands the importance of female friendship as manifested in her relationship with Kit, and, despite the fact that she also tries to exercise power over Kit, she privileges the intimacy of their sisterhood and finds refuge in it from the threat of the adult world.

Both *Gems* and Churchill (in *Owners*) signal the problematic nature of surrogacy when deployed to a utilitarian end; though in *Top Girls* Churchill locates surrogate mothering as an ethically and emotionally viable arrangement. *Queen Christina* presents a protagonist who was denied her birthright, *Owners* shows a character uninterested in giving birth, while *Top Girls* features a woman who renounces motherhood herself. As for their location in the public versus private sphere, all three protagonists follow trajectories in both. Christina is transferred from

the private to the public under Axel's surrogate care, in order to move back to the private on the occasion of her discovery of femininity. Marion and Marlene also pass from the private to the public; however, this is engineered by their own career aspirations rather than external intervention. Situated throughout in the private sphere of the home, Lisa, Joyce and Angie have the least access to choice with regard to the exercise of both career and maternity. Joyce simply takes over Marlene's daughter (as Marion does Lisa's); while Angie is entirely denied any potential for success. Thus, the playwrights signal possibilities of transgression with regard to conventional perceptions of the feminine, yet they also highlight the cost at which it is often achieved (intra-gender oppression in *Owners* and *Top Girls*, reconstruction of gender identity in *Queen Christina*).

While Gems structures her play in a chronologically linear timeframe, Churchill subverts linearity altogether in *Top Girls*, her cyclical sense of time placing the individual histories against a universal backdrop. Despite the different outcomes brought about by the endings of these plays, the playwrights offer all the protagonists the promise of a new start. Christina overcomes her resignation, mapping out a fresh direction in life; Marion loses property, yet finds herself victorious over the more significant loss experienced by others; while Marlene re-enacts her abandonment of Angie and hence, symbolically returns to the start of her quest. The supporting characters, however, are not granted a voice at this stage either. Angie is shown in despair at Marlene's act of denial and the prospect of a bleak future, Joyce is not even present, while Lisa is left to contemplate the destruction of both her baby and home.

Gems and Churchill - writing from different positions in terms of feminist involvement - acknowledge, therefore, the importance of addressing women's

options for a simultaneous assumption of mothering and career. They concentrate on cases in which mothering and the achievement of professional success mutually rule out one another, as a result of prioritising either of the two alternatives. By contrasting instances of bourgeois-egalitarian feminism to socialist as well as cultural feminism, the playwrights signal both the complexity and internal contradictions within feminist thinking. They also insist on the inadequacy of the current state of affairs in terms of employment opportunities, and urge a new negotiation of women's overall place in society. When Churchill refuses to impose a straightforward solution to her play she also challenges her audience to continue the debate off-stage, thus appealing to theatre as a factor of potential social change.

¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Viking, 1997), p. 399. The first 3 pages of this introduction are indebted to Rowbotham's analysis.

² Hélène Cixous, for instance, famously contested the binary opposition between woman and man, feminine and masculine, positing a third way that celebrated the space in-between polar opposites. Cf. Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (originally published in 1976), in *New French Feminisms*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981).

³ Griselda Pollock, 'Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition, 1978', *Feminist Review*, 2. (1979), p. 38.

⁴ The idea of men giving birth was an image reworked, for example, in the series of *Alien* movies in the eighties.

⁵ The film equally investigated the relationship of the viewer to film, a preoccupation carried on by Mulvey in her subsequent film criticism. Cf. her work on the male spectator, published in *Screen* and in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

⁶ Rowbotham, p. 400.

⁷ Martin Esslin, *New Theatre Voices of the Seventies* (Methuen, 1981), p. vii.

⁸ Booker, Christopher, *The Seventies: Portrait of a Decade* (London: Allen Lane, 1980), p. 5.

⁹ David Edgar, *The Second Time as Farce* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 119.

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', in *The Politics of Thatcherism*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (London: Lawrence & Wishart & Marxism Today, 1983), pp. 19-39.

¹¹ Margaret Thatcher, 1984, quoted in Ian Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma: Britain under Thatcherism* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 142.

¹² Sonia Copland, Conservative councillor at Greater London Council, quoted in Rowbotham, p. 470.

¹³ Margaret Thatcher, 'Women in a Changing World', Press Office, Downing Street, July 1982, quoted in Segal, 1983b, p. 208.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Thatcher, quoted in Hugo Young, *One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Pan Books, 1993), p. 306.; Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (London: Virago Press, 1987).

¹⁶ Campbell stresses, drawing on MORI polls, that women have traditionally been more likely to vote Tory than Labour (by 5-10%). Cf. Campbell, p. 112.

- ¹⁷ Keith D. Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 22.
- ¹⁸ Young, *One of Us*, p. 601.
- ¹⁹ Barbara Castle, *Fighting All the Way* (London: Pan Books, 1994), p. 458.
- ²⁰ Campbell, p. 246.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² This opposition might also be read as a reference to the antithesis between the eighties' mainstream tendency for 'power dressing' and the simple yet subversive, almost androgynous look advocated by radical feminists, often associated with the 'loony left'.
- ²³ Pam Gems, in *Plays by Women*, Volume 1., ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 73-74.
- ²⁴ Lyn Gardner, 'Precious Gems', *Plays and Players* (April 1985), p. 12.
- ²⁵ Pam Gems, interviewed by Heidi Stevenson and Natasha Langridge, in *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), p. 90.
- ²⁶ Katherine H. Burkman, 'The Plays of Pam Gems: Personal/Political/Personal', in *British and Irish Drama since 1960*, ed. by James Acheson (London: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 190.
- ²⁷ There has been ample evidence of her inclination towards controversy throughout her work, starting from the early monologues known as 'black pieces' - in *My Warren* (1973), for instance, a young girl gets rid of her unwanted baby by flushing it down the toilet - to her later and better-known plays.
- ²⁸ Interview with Ann McFerran, *Time Out* (7 October 1977a).
- ²⁹ Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993b), p. 17.
- ³⁰ Goodman, 1993b, p. 222.
- ³¹ As Gems declared, it is impossible to be both a 'voice for feminism' and an artist - a slightly ironic statement in the light of several younger women playwrights acknowledging the feminist influences of Gems's plays. Cf. Goodman and Jane de Gay, *Feminist Stages* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996) p. 297.
- ³² Gems, interviewed by Stevenson and Langridge, p. 92.
- ³³ Gems, quoted in Goodman, 1993b, p. 17.
- ³⁴ Interview with Ann McFerran, 1977a.
- ³⁵ Gems, interviewed by Stevenson and Langridge, p. 95.
- ³⁶ Gems, quoted in Susan Carlson, 'Revisionary Endings: Pam Gems' *Aunt Mary* and *Camille*, in *Making a Spectacle: Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. by Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), p. 103.
- ³⁷ Gems's response to the question: 'Can theatre affect social change?', in Goodman and de Gay, p. 31.
- ³⁸ Gems, 'Imagination and Gender', in Michelene Wandor, ed., *On Gender and Writing* (London: Pandora Press, 1983), pp. 148-151.
- ³⁹ Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama, 1890-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 453-454.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Gems, *Three Plays: Pias, Camille, Loving Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) and *The Snow Palace* (London: Oberon, 1998).
- ⁴¹ Susan Bassnett-McGuire, 'Towards a Theory of Women's Theatre', in *Semiotics of Drama and Theatre: New Perspectives in the Theory of Drama*, ed. by Herta Schmid and Aloysius van Kesteren (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamin, 1984), pp. 445-466.
- ⁴² Gems, afterword to 'Queen Christina', in Mary Remnant, ed., *Plays by Women*, volume 5. (London: Methuen, 1986).
- ⁴³ Gems, interviewed by Stevenson and Langridge, pp. 91-92.
- ⁴⁴ Sarah J. Rudolph, 'Pam Gems', in *British Playwrights, 1956-1995*, ed. by William W. Demastes, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996).
- ⁴⁵ Gems, in Georgina Brown, 'Something out of the Ordinary: take a racy turn of phrase, robust humour and an astute awareness of feminine and feminist issues and you have the only British female playwright now in the West End' (*The Independent*, 31 January 1996).
- ⁴⁶ Elaine Aston, 'Pam Gems: Body Politics and Biography', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, ed. by Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 158.
- ⁴⁷ Gems, *Queen Christina*, 1986, p. 17. All further quotations are taken from this edition.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁰ CHRISTINA: 'My bloody period. Of all the ludicrous patterns in nature, hens are better off'. Cf. p. 19.

⁵¹ *Queen Christina*, directed by Rouben Maoulian.

⁵² Gems, afterword, 1986, p. 47.

⁵³ Gems, interviewed by Stevenson and Langridge, p. 95.

⁵⁴ Gems, afterword, 1986, p. 47.

⁵⁵ Aston, 2000, p. 160.

⁵⁶ Gems, *Sunday Telegraph* (19 June 1977).

⁵⁷ Geraldine Cousin, *Women in Dramatic Place and Time* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 153.

⁵⁸ Gems, 1986, p. 19.

⁵⁹ Lynda Hart, 'Introduction: Performing Feminism', in *Making a Spectacle*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Annette Kuhn, *The Power of Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 50.

⁶¹ The play's obsession with Christina's physical appearance conjures up a whole range of references, both from various positions in feminist writing and mainstream Western culture. Though Gems's stage directions suggest a rather self-assured butch-looking protagonist, embodying the seventies type of the outgoing, active, mannish lesbian; Christina is fully aware of the operations and drawbacks of 'the beauty myth'. Her mother directly, and Christina indirectly, refer to her lack of good looks as a major problem in not being able to attract the members of the opposite sex. This is a point generally accepted as an understatement in day-to-day life, yet banished from the sphere of politically correct attitudes roughly from the emergence of second wave feminism. With the advent of new or post-feminism though, the manipulative power of beauty returns with a vengeance, claiming a space in most current gender-related debates. Cf. especially Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1991).

⁶² Gems, 1986, p. 20.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 24.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

⁶⁶ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 121.

⁶⁷ Demands voiced at the first national Women's Liberation conference in 1970, quoted in Michelene Wandor, ed., *The Body Politic* (London: Stage 1, 1972), p. 2.

⁶⁸ Gems, 1986, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷² Ibid., p. 31.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁷⁶ Aston, 2000, p. 160.

⁷⁷ Gems, 1986, p. 34.

⁷⁸ 'In the seventies, lesbianism was perceived as a feminist, political act by the burgeoning women's right movement, and there were many rules to the sapphic sex act'. Cf. Alice Fisher, quoted in Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999), p. 237. 'Women who identify as lesbians do not view lesbianism as a sexual phenomenon first and foremost'. Cf. Lilian Faderman, quoted in Greer, 1999, p. 242.

⁷⁹ Gems, 1986, p. 35.

⁸⁰ Sylvie Pierce, chief executive of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, in Natasha Walter, *The New Feminism* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), p. 110. A similar idea is explored further in a 1983 statement: 'Sometimes the disappointment of discovering that lesbianism, which was and is seen by many feminists as a political solution to the problem of men, could be just as bitter and painful and debilitating as heterosexuality, was devastating'. Frankie Rickford, 'No More Sleeping Beauties and Frozen Boys', in *The Left and the Erotic*, ed. by Eileen Phillips (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), pp. 139-147.

⁸¹ Gems, 1986, p. 37.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Walter, 1998, p. 121.

⁸⁴ Gems, 1986, p. 41.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., p. 45.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Gems's reiteration of the term 'choose' in this context recalls and reverses the well-known slogan demanding the availability of abortions: 'A Woman's Right to Choose'.

⁹⁸ Gems, 1986, p. 45.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, 'Claiming a Space', in Griffiths and Llewellyn-Jones, p. 35.

¹⁰¹ Gems, 1986, p. 45.

¹⁰² For further insights into the interpretation of hysteric fits as rebellion and contestation see Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, translated by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

¹⁰³ Cf. Henrik Ibsen, 'A Doll's House', in *Plays*, transl. by Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1990). Gems published her own version of 'A Doll's House' in 1980.

¹⁰⁴ The words she utters while chasing Azzolino and striking at him with a whip are predominantly centred on her failed motherhood: 'I want my children', 'Where's my daughter?' Cf. Gems, 1986, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ Clément, 'The Guilty One', in *The Newly Born Woman*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 5. Also cf. Freud's case study of Dora and Cixous's own play, 'A Portrait of Dora', in Simone Benmussa, *Benmussa Directs* (London: John Calder, 1979).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ Cousin, 1996, p. 156.

¹¹⁰ Llewellyn-Jones, p. 35.

¹¹¹ Cousin, 1996, p. 158.

¹¹² 'She was like the odd mare steeple-chasing'. Pam Gems, interviewed by Stevenson and Langridge, *Rage and Reason*, p. 93.

¹¹³ For a more elaborate experimentation with the principle of performing gender see Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (London: Pluto Press; Joint Stock Theatre Group, 1980).

¹¹⁴ Innes, p. 457.

¹¹⁵ Churchill, interview with Ann McFerran, *Time Out* (21-7 October 1977b).

¹¹⁶ Churchill, quoted in Elaine Aston, *Caryl Churchill* (Plymouth: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 1997b), p. 19.

¹¹⁷ He is called Worsely, suggesting that, in a sense, he is the dark side of Marion as he carries out all the unpleasant deals and deeds on her behalf.

¹¹⁸ John Elsom, *The Listener* (21 December 1972), p. 874.

¹¹⁹ Aston, 1997b, p. 23.

¹²⁰ Martin Esslin, *Plays and Players* (February 1973), pp. 41-42.

¹²¹ Michael Billington, *The Guardian* (13 December 1972).

¹²² Michelene Wandor, *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 168.

¹²³ Cf. Worsely's cold-blooded dialogues with Clegg about murdering Marion.

¹²⁴ Caryl Churchill, 'Owners', in *Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 66. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

¹²⁵ Geraldine Cousin, *Churchill, the Playwright* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), p. 94.

¹²⁶ Innes, p. 460.

¹²⁷ Churchill, 1985, p. 67.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

¹²⁹ Phyllis Chesler, *Sacred Bond: Motherhood under Siege* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 122.

¹³⁰ Churchill, in Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 282.

¹³¹ Cf. Churchill, interviewed by McFerran, 1977b.

¹³² Aston, 1997b, p. 20.

¹³³ John Vidal, 'Power and the Woman', *The Guardian* (9 April 1987).

¹³⁴ The stage directions indicate that Marion should wear expensive, yet badly matching clothes, often coming undone and slightly askew.

¹³⁵ Innes, pp. 460-461.

¹³⁶ Also see the plays of Louise Page, generally acknowledged as conveying an unequivocal bourgeois feminist stance. Cf. her early/mid-eighties dramas on female professional success and mother-daughter relationships: 'Salonika' (1982) and 'Real Estate' (1984), in *Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1990).

¹³⁷ Gayle Austin, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 6.

¹³⁸ *Top Girls* itself came to be seen as a visionary piece. By the time of Max Stafford-Clark's 1991 revival of his original 1982 production, what had initially been interpreted as a provocative play about women's status in the early eighties was reconsidered as a 'prophetic play about the conflicts faced by women in the modern age more generally'. Cf. Lizbeth Goodman, 'Overlapping Dialogue in Overlapping Media: Behind the Scenes of *Top Girls*', in *Essays on Caryl Churchill: Contemporary Representations*, ed. by Sheila Rabillard, (Winnipeg, Buffalo: Blizzard Publishing, 1998), p. 76.

¹³⁹ Chicago's piece is an experimental work, an installation that consists of a vast triangle-shaped table with 999 references to names and thirty-nine actual place settings, each including a chalice and a plate and commemorating a woman from myth or history. By staging the encounter of famous women over a meal, Chicago on the one hand seemingly legitimises the mainstream tendency to associate women's place in society with the domestic, but on the other, she subverts this conventional image, as these women are being honoured, treated to a feast and serviced in a manner generally reserved for men. Though Chicago's piece is by far the best known, American feminist art has produced several other variations on the trope of historical female ancestry via the symbolic encounter of famous women. Mary Beth Edelson's *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper*, for instance, is a pastiche - as the title suggests as well - of Leonardo da Vinci's eponymous painting. *Happy Birthday America*, also by Edelson, is 'not a passive act but a denial of patriarchy and a re-creation of our own image, energy, self, situation, time, space and our own interpretation of these events' using Ingres' 1863 *Le Bain Turc* and incorporating into it portraits of contemporary American feminist artists. Cf. N. Broude & M. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1994), p. 125. Chicago's installation has been known - starting from its first public exhibition - as an icon of feminist intervention in the arts. In the British context, the piece gained an extra 'theatrical' and activist-feminist dimension by being brought to London via the mediation of the Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company with whom Churchill worked on *Vinegar Tom* in the late 70s.

¹⁴⁰ Trevor R. Griffiths, 'Waving Not Drowning', in Griffiths and Llewellyn-Jones, p. 57.

¹⁴¹ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986b).

¹⁴² Churchill interviewed, in Fitzsimmons, p. 61.

¹⁴³ Doubling, of course, is also used as a means to enable a few actors play a multitude of roles and, as such, has been a constant feature of productions since the seventies. In recent productions of *Cloud Nine* new ways of doubling have been introduced, hence subverting in yet another dimension the idea of a particular doubling arrangement.

¹⁴⁴ Concept introduced in 1974 by the American feminist activist and writer, Jo Freeman (Joreen) and circulated by the Anarchist Workers' Association. Cf. Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Move* (New York: McKay, 1975).

¹⁴⁵ Polly Toynbee recalls her personal experience of the time: 'If any sister appeared in the press she was accused of ego-tripping, so statements were issued anonymously' (*The Independent*, 8 March 1995). On the other hand, Beatrix Campbell and Anna Coote emphasised: 'Those who put themselves

forward were commonly dismissed as opportunists'. Cf. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 336.

¹⁴⁶ Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 97.

¹⁴⁷ Juli Thompson Burk, 'Top Girls and the Politics of Representation', in *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter*, ed. by Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 69.

¹⁴⁸ Janet Brown, 'Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* Catches the Next Wave', in *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook*, ed. by Phyllis Randall (New York, London: Garland Pub., 1988) p. 117. Brown continues her statement with a prophetic observation regarding the second section of the play, thus blending together past, present and future: 'The child's dream of the future reminds us of what is at stake in the feminist struggle for societal transformation'.

¹⁴⁹ Innes, p. 465.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Jane Thomas, 'The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Essays in Refusal', in *The Death of the Playwright?: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*, ed. by Adrian Page, (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 182.

¹⁵² Janet Brown, 1988, p. 128.

¹⁵³ Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, transl. by James and Tania Stern (London: Methuen, 1963).

¹⁵⁴ This scene, however, can also be read as a vehicle for Angie's exercise of power over Kit. As opposed to the younger Kit, Angie is shown celebrating her passage into adult womanhood. Through this act Angie replicates Marlene's location in a position of power, above both Joyce and herself.

¹⁵⁵ As an illustration of another approach, situated between Gret's overt rebellion and Joyce's passivity see Kay Adshead's naturalistic play 'Thatcher's Women' - in *Plays by Women*, vol. 7., ed. by Mary Remnant (London: Methuen Drama, 1988). Its protagonists, a handful of unemployed Northern working-class women, resort to prostitution in London - and hence to a subversion of moral values - in order to make ends meet under the dire economic conditions of the Thatcher era.

¹⁵⁶ Austin E. Quigley, 'Stereotype and Prototype: Character in the Plays of Caryl Churchill', in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. by Enoch Brater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 40.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ The technique of overlapping dialogue introduced by Churchill for this occasion, has become a frequent device since, both in her own subsequent plays and in the work of other playwrights.

¹⁵⁹ Elin Diamond, '(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theater', in *Making a Spectacle*, p. 260.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the work of Deborah Tannen (*Talking from 9 to 5: How Men's and Women's Conversational Styles Affect who gets Heard, who Gets Credit and what Gets Done at Work* (London: Virago 1995); *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (London: Virago 1992) and Jennifer Coates (*Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences* (Longman 1993); *Women in Their Speech Communities: New Perspectives on Language and Sex* (Longman, 1988). Both writers highlight the participative and consultative nature of women's language as opposed to men's competitive and hierarchical approaches. For an entirely opposite view (not from the domain of sociolinguistics), see Donna J. Haraway's controversial essay, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', that suggests that 'the feminist dream of a common language - like all dreams of perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience - is a totalizing and imperialist one.' See Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 173.

¹⁶¹ Diamond, p. 266.

¹⁶² Cf. Churchill, [*Softcops* and] *Fen* (London: Methuen, 1986). *Fen* was written immediately after *Top Girls* and was seen as, arguably, its companion play of sorts.

¹⁶³ Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls*, new ed. (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), p. 59. All further quotations are taken from this edition.

¹⁶⁴ The terms 'stereotype of the past' and 'prototype of the future' are borrowed from Quigley, p. 43.

¹⁶⁵ Janet Brown, 1988, p. 118. Brown quotes Frank Rich's argument further, emphasising his critique of Churchill for not including a broader range of representative experiences on behalf of employed women. In his opinion, the presence in the play of the 'middle range of women who achieve without imitating power-crazed men and denying their own humanity' would have equally been legitimate. Though seemingly relevant, such a solution would have had the effect of diverting attention to the examination of individual cases, an outcome not included in Churchill's focus. Her interest is not to

point out individuals, but to alert attention to the extremes and hence, to the overall failures in the system of capitalist patriarchy as such, since 'the loss of humanity is everyone's loss'.

¹⁶⁶ Churchill, 1991, pp. 83-84.

¹⁶⁷ Angela Neustatter, *Hyenas in Petticoats: A Look at Twenty Years of Feminism* (London: Harrap, 1989), p. 14.

¹⁶⁸ Keith D. Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 11.

¹⁶⁹ Roy Hattersley, *Fifty Years On* (London: Little, Brown and Co., 1997), p. 268.

¹⁷⁰ Hall, 1988, p. 47.

¹⁷¹ Thatcher was aware of her unpopularity (she was billed the most unpopular Prime Minister since polling began), yet she claimed: 'Popularity isn't the thing, it is respect that you've got if you have the guts to do what's right for the country'. Cf. 'Thatcher: The Downing Street Years'.

¹⁷² Thatcher particularly liked to point out the parallels between 'the management of the national economy [and that] of a household budget.' Ibid.

¹⁷³ Thatcher herself acknowledged and welcomed this idea of succession: 'I presided over a very successful economy' and Mr Blair 'inherited the economic boom'. Cf. Andrew Grice, 'Ten Years after the Fall of Thatcher, Blair Says It's Time Politics Moved On', *The Independent* (23 November 2000).

¹⁷⁴ Michael White and Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Irate Blair Savages Thatcher', *The Guardian* (24 November 2000). Blair added: 'There were things that were done in the Eighties that were good and we have kept, but there were four fundamental failings. Britain had a boom-and-bust economy where people's mortgage rates went all over the place. We had huge social division, three million unemployment and chronic under-investment in our public services'. Cf. Grice.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Walter, 1998.

¹⁷⁶ Walter, 1998, p. 176.

¹⁷⁷ E.g. 'I am used to the heat in the kitchen' Cf. 'Thatcher: The Downing Street Years'.

¹⁷⁸ Amelia Howe-Kritzer, 'Labour and Capital', in Kritzer, *The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Theatre of Empowerment* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 141.

¹⁷⁹ Churchill, 1991, p. 66.

¹⁸⁰ According to the principles of Marlene's agency - heartily satirised by Churchill in the short scenes featuring interviews between the candidates and the 'Top Girls' - women seeking employment are expected and even urged to market themselves in a style at least as aggressive as that of the male competitors. Whoever fails to perform at this level of expectation is instantly labelled as pathetic and unsuitable for further attention, let alone career promotion.

¹⁸¹ Churchill, 1991, p. 86.

¹⁸² Hall, 1988, p. 46. 'Families', the second term originally included in Thatcher's statement ('the basic units of society are individuals and families') has been considered less shocking, and was subsequently, a lot less commented upon. Taking into account the standard Tory slogan of being the 'Party of the Families' and their advocating a return to Victorian family values it is a seemingly appropriate and convincing comment. When analysing, however, their actual policies and lack of support for families in need, the emphasis on families is just as shocking and cynical as the denial of recognition to the cohesiveness of society.

¹⁸³ Churchill claims: 'Angie says she thinks Marlene is really her mother, I didn't mean her to know it; I meant it to be wishful thinking'. Cf. Churchill in Goodman, 1998, p. 91.

¹⁸⁴ In one American production, after her final word, Angie tried to lie across Marlene's lap while the latter remained stiff and uninviting. Ironically interrogating Michelangelo's Pietà, one of the best-known images of maternal involvement and affection, this set-up had the capacity to make Marlene's indifference to and alienation from motherhood even stronger. Cf. Juli Thompson Burk, directing *Top Girls* at the University of Hawaii, Fall 1987, pp. 75-76.

¹⁸⁵ Max Stafford-Clark: 'The moment when Angie says 'frightening' is incredibly frightening on stage. The play is also frightening and frighteningly prophetic, written on the threshold of Thatcher's eighties, as it posits the perspective that those who are less talented, those who are weaker, will go to the wall'. Cf. Goodman, 1998, p. 91.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Innes, p. 466.

¹⁸⁷ Max Stafford-Clark emphasised the prophetic nature of the play in this respect: 'When you see the increased number of people begging in the streets, and you realize that [that sight] would have been shocking in the context of the early eighties, or fifteen or twenty years ago, you see that the play is prophetic'. Stafford-Clark, in Goodman, 1998, p. 90.

¹⁸⁸ Frances Gray, 'Caryl Churchill and Joint Stock', in *British Drama since 1960*, ed. by James Acheson (St. Martin's Press, 1993).

¹⁸⁹ Quigley, p. 46.

¹⁹⁰ Churchill, 1991, p. 86., italics Joseph Marohl.

¹⁹¹ Peacock, p. 21.

¹⁹² In an interview touching upon the presence of women in key positions in America, Churchill claims that in her view 'there's no such thing as right-wing feminism', Laurie Stone, 'Making Room at the Top', *The Village Voice*, XXVIII, 9. (1 March 1983), p. 81.

¹⁹³ Lou Wakefield, quoted by Janet Brown, 1988, p. 120.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Janet Brown, 1988, p. 128.

¹⁹⁶ Lisa Merrill, 'Monsters and Heroines', in *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook*, p. 84.

¹⁹⁷ Laurie Stone, pp. 80-81.

¹⁹⁸ Churchill, interviewed by Robert Gore-Langton, 'Making Room at the Top', *The Independent* (10 April 1991).

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 4

From Metaphor to Medical Intervention:

The Theme of Surrogate Parenting

4.1 Introduction

Exploring dilemmas and difficulties with regard to mothering and substitute parenting, Gems and Churchill arrive at contradictory conclusions. Despite their focus on the respective non-conventional and career-centred trajectories of Queen Christina, Marion and Marlene, the two playwrights interpret the role of surrogacy differently. Churchill values the genuine dedication of Joyce for Angie, whereas Gems expresses her reservations about Axel's surrogate parenting, which is ultimately responsible for Christina's ambivalence in matters of gender identity. In fact, Gems concludes her play with a critique of the outcome of Christina's gender-bending surrogate nurturing, whereas Churchill captures the possibility of hope and the survival of genuine human relationships. Churchill argues for the viability of surrogate bonds above biological ones and makes a case for the plausibility of emotional involvement versus the constraints of (random) blood links. This chapter will elaborate on the issue of surrogate parenting. Aided by Julia Kristeva's essay, 'Women's Time'¹ as a theoretical foundation, I wish to negotiate some of the parallels and differences between two plays written only ten years apart yet generated by changing aesthetic and political climates: Michelene Wandor's *AID Thy Neighbour* (1978) and Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* (1987).

Michelene Wandor juxtaposes a heterosexual and a lesbian couple in *AID Thy Neighbour*, and analyses their lives and aspirations in terms of shared dreams and

mutual replication. Both couples long for a child, but only one of them emerges successful at the end of a chronological progression. By locating the lesbian couple in a position of success (the heterosexual one gives up), Wandor simultaneously reinforces and challenges women's integration into (male-identified) linear time - associated by Kristeva with the first, equality-seeking strand of second-wave feminism. On the one hand, her lesbians replicate heterosexual practice, both via the hierarchical organisation of their partnership and their eventual parenthood. In this sense, therefore, they fail to totally undermine the operation of patriarchy, since - (re)-appropriating mainstream societal norms - they symbolically reinsert themselves into a quest for equality with men. On the other hand - and crucially for the late seventies - Wandor also dissociates the desire for parenting from sexual orientation. Thus she makes a strong human rights claim, whilst situating her lesbian couple outside the patriarchal system, in a radical subversion of its values and principles

Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* starts off with an overt subversion of linearity. The four protagonists are all women, represented on their own terms, removed from direct encounters with men. The women not only interact exclusively with each other but they use the device of memory to reconstruct and revisit past events. Thus, their stories often replicate or paraphrase each other, generating a sense of cyclical time - associated by Kristeva with the second, radical phase of feminism and with women's attempts at organising their lives as separate from the world of men. Representing four generations in a female lineage, Keatley's characters also illustrate the consecutive strands in the women's movement: the pre-feminist Doris, the equality-feminist Margaret and the radical Jackie. Rosie's case is the least obvious, as she stands for an age currently in progress, possibly encapsulating the third phase theorised by Kristeva: the attempts to negotiate

between the first two phases and engineer a fusion between the linear and cyclical perceptions of time.

Writing after the establishment of second-wave feminism, Michelene Wandor came across as a self-consciously political writer whose major aim was to shed light on society's enduring problems with feminism, parenting and homosexuality. While, earlier, Delaney had presented the connection between women's issues and homosexuality as incidental, Wandor focused on the importance of generalising this correspondence and turned it into polemical drama. Hinting at the crisis of masculinity in the late fifties, Delaney featured a gay character who is more than willing to accept Jo's baby; whereas Wandor examined a lesbian couple's passionate quest for a child in *AID Thy Neighbour*. Wandor intended her play as a direct response to the debates-cum-scandals related to non-heterosexual parenting in the (mainly tabloid) press of the late seventies, and she wrote it as a result of a political commission. Yet like Bagnold, *AID Thy Neighbour* also manipulated the West-End conventions of her time; in this case the genre of English comedy developed by Alan Ayckbourn. Constantly emphasising the play's comic note, Wandor claimed that she wanted to provide a good night out for the audience just as much as to raise a political question for discussion.

Despite the fact that both Wandor (as a second-wave feminist) and Keatley (born a generation later) have advocated socialist feminism, they have chosen divergent artistic pathways to render their beliefs. As opposed to Wandor's middle-class intellectual radicalism, Keatley - like Delaney - emphasised her Northern, working-class background and proclaimed an intuitive rather than theory-oriented way of writing. This intuitive factor delayed her search for a director and a company to stage *My Mother Said I Never Should*. The major difficulty lay in its non-

conventional form and structure, factors that were instrumental in her wanting first and foremost to write a play. For Keatley - unlike Wandor - radicalism was not as much about content but about form; therefore her concern was to subvert the traditional linear time that has characterised a good deal of writing for the stage, and to introduce a more associative rather than cause-effect logic. Keatley's sense of time is cyclical, constantly reverting to flashbacks that feature the characters as children with the bonds of relationships erased between them, somewhat like the dinner scene in Churchill's *Top Girls*. The rest of the play, however, operates in a fairly naturalistic format, the characters acting out problematic mother-daughter relationships alongside mainly successful surrogate parenting situations.

4.2 Assisted Reproduction as a Route to Alternative Parenting:

Micheline Wandor's Feminist Activism in *AID Thy Neighbour*

While several plays discussed in this thesis are centred on the psychological aspects of parenting somebody else's child,² Micheline Wandor used *AID Thy Neighbour* to examine the biological, political and social complexities of surrogate parenting. Unlike other playwrights mentioned so far, Wandor has stressed - especially in the early stages of her career - the necessity for an explicit and immediately effective theatre. For her, feminist and socialist interventions should inextricably be intertwined in order to transmit a clear political message. Although she has claimed that the political label should not overshadow the relationship between the 'conscious idea in social circulation' and what 'happens in the imagination of the writer', she stressed that the political analysis was 'absolutely essential' in understanding 'what writers have been doing in the 1970s and 1980s'.³ In recent interviews investigating

whether theatre can affect social change, however, she gave an ambivalent answer: theatre 'appears to move people very powerfully', yet at the same time

It is not where political decisions are made. It impinges on social change, it can affect social change, but it is not executive in it.⁴ It is not the arena where politics is played out.⁵

Nevertheless, she has distanced herself from what she considered politically less engaged or artistically too cryptic works by her fellow women playwrights.⁶ Meanwhile, she justified the realism permeating most of her own plays and critical work, by claiming that

Artistic movements which seek to represent the experiences of oppressed groups reach initially for a realistic and immediately recognisable clarity.⁷

Wandor's career is unique in the context of the playwrights examined in this dissertation, owing to her active role in the Women's Liberation Movement:

I can't separate the way I try to look at things from the way I write, so I'd say I'm conscious of trying to incorporate a feminist way of looking at things in my work.⁸

Janelle Reinelt has claimed that it was Wandor - more than any other single person - who helped to elucidate the relationship between theatre and the Women's Movement in Britain;⁹ and posited Wandor's career as a 'prototype' for the experiences of women who started to work in British theatre during the 1960s. Reinelt singles out such factors as Wandor's early interest in theatre, English degree, free-lance activity as a poet and critic, return to do an MA, writing plays whilst raising children and participating in Marxist study groups. Thus, the pattern included a middle-class, university background and socialist affiliations, but also the co-existence of career and parenting. Wandor reflected on the period in the following way:

The general raising of the political temperature meant that all playwrights, even those who did not see themselves as 'political' or who tried to keep their distance from various political ideologies, were influenced by the public nature of the political debates and the visibility of political activism - socialist and feminist - at the end of the 1960s and the first part of the 1970s.¹⁰

Starting from the early seventies, Wandor has not only been an enthusiastic participant in, but also a prolific theorist of, the Women's Movement, writing and editing several collections of essays on feminism and on its impact upon theatre.¹¹ She is best known for her critical analyses *Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* and *Look Back in Gender*, in which she reassessed the negotiation of family, gender relations and sexual politics in post-war British theatre. Her work as a reviewer for *Time Out* during the seventies was equally valuable, as in this capacity she offered less theoretically substantiated yet nevertheless critically reliable references for a wider readership. Apart from her activity as a critic, Wandor played an important role in promoting the work of other contemporary women playwrights by facilitating the publication of scripts. She was the initiator and first editor of the Methuen collections of texts entitled *Plays by Women*, a series that has since spanned two decades and included ten volumes. Wandor has also been preoccupied with literary adaptations for the stage, and more recently, with radio drama.¹²

Despite her involvement with feminism, Wandor also pointed out the prejudice that is often associated with the feminist label: 'Every so often there is somebody who assumes that I am only interested in "women's subjects" or women writers'.¹³ Equally, she voiced her reservations with regard to the term 'feminist theatre'. In her view such a category was not 'useful' because it would not lead anywhere; it could not be defined and was not an 'analytical category'.¹⁴ Instead, she suggested focusing on the relationship between 'feminism' and 'theatre' or 'gender' and 'theatre' in order to explore and celebrate women's work for the stage. She equally resisted the utilisation of the alternative term - 'women's theatre' - on the grounds of its being intellectually and critically counterproductive. She felt that the use of such labels would limit the understanding of theatre as an industry and as a

branch of the arts, and would 'collapse everything into a desired condition'.¹⁵ In an earlier statement she exemplified the reductive nature of such a categorisation by claiming that most attempts to define 'feminist theatre' or 'feminist plays' 'ended up with a rather lame assertion that anything about women is necessarily feminist'.¹⁶

Writing in 2000 she presented her views as follows:

While it may be interesting to know whether a woman playwright considers herself a feminist, in the end her work will consist of a mix of conscious and unconscious impulses. Fiction is not journalism, [...] and the workings of the imagination cannot be reduced to analysis at the level of conscious intent.¹⁷

Few British playwrights, in fact, have appropriated the label 'feminist theatre' and hardly any would describe their own work in these terms. Generally, they have either rejected the term altogether or only used it in specific circumstances, re-defining its meaning for their own purposes. On the other hand, critics have tended to utilise it with considerable frequency. In fact, most of the key critical sources published on women playwrights in the last ten years have contained the term 'feminist theatre' in their titles.¹⁸ In the definition of Lizbeth Goodman - author of influential works on women playwrights - 'feminist theatre'

Is theatre, which works in some way to present positive images of women, or to improve the status of women in the theatre (even if written by men or produced by mix-gender companies).¹⁹

Thus, Goodman not only appropriates the labels in question but firmly suggests a synonymy between feminist theatre and theatre produced by and for women.

Wandor has written more than fifteen stage plays since the early seventies, ranging between productions at the National Theatre to lunchtime theatre. The genres and styles she has explored in her plays equally cover a broad scale, from verse drama (*Aurora Leigh*) to melodrama (*The Wandering Jew*) and realist theatre (*The Old Wives' Tale*) to domestic comedy (*Scissors* and *AID Thy Neighbour*).²⁰ She has been categorised as a predominantly realist writer, although she later refuted the

label, clarifying that realism was what 'people were writing in the seventies', not her current aesthetic commitment.²¹ She compared the 1970s tendency for realism to the rise of the novel in the nineteenth century, when 'The most political way to write about the conditions of ordinary people was to record' the details of daily life.²² Wandor's 'domestic realist' mode of writing has allowed for both working-class and middle-class audiences to encounter a setting they could relate to via personal experience and, hence, feel at ease in the theatre. In this sense, her style recalls Catherine Belsey's notion of 'classic realism': as works that 'carry the authority of an apparent familiarity' and thus, have a tendency to 'efface their own textuality'.²³

In terms of content, *AID Thy Neighbour* interrogates a number of radical issues on the seventies feminist agenda. The play was designed as part of a mini-season of two productions centred on feminist and lesbian issues, initiated by the Women's Project Group and directed by Kate Crutchley at the Theatre at New End in London. As in a number of other Wandor plays, there is an exploration of the relationship between the personal and the political, presenting a strong case for the audience to associate with. In Goodman's terms, the play qualifies as a sample of feminist theatre, being 'the first feminist play about Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID)'.²⁴ Jill Davies included the play in the so-called 'issue based' (as opposed to the 'coming out') lesbian canon, alongside *Care and Control* and Sarah Daniels's *Neaptide*.²⁵ In a similar manner to *Care and Control*,²⁶ a play scripted by Wandor and devised by Gay Sweatshop, *AID Thy Neighbour* is aimed at consciousness-raising. Although *AID Thy Neighbour* was not written as a political commission like *Care and Control*, it reacted to a similar cultural context: an intense debate in the press on a topical issue.²⁷

The two plays also share the theme of lesbian mothering, but while *Care and Control* focuses on child custody - challenging the 'legal and social hegemonies which repress lesbian motherhood'²⁸ - *AID Thy Neighbour* investigates the possibilities of non-heterosexual parenting. In both plays Wandor interrogates the values according to which the operation of mothering is defined and negotiated in society; and by demonstrating through convincing examples what she considers the morally right outcome, she adds a didactic overtone to the theatrical experience. She concentrates on two couples (plus the women's former husbands in *Care and Control*) who start off from a similar situation but whose destinies turn in different directions by the end of the play. One of the couples in each case turns out to be successful (respectively managing to obtain custody of the child or have a baby) while the other fails, yet only *AID Thy Neighbour* features an unambiguous happy ending that also engineers a reversal of mainstream values.

AID Thy Neighbour is a contemporary comedy of manners that reworks the drawing room tradition, combined with elements of agit-prop and social realism. Paraphrasing the English comedy was one of the first principles that generated the play, alongside Wandor's preoccupation with topical political messages. Wandor has referred to the play as a 'sub-Ayckbournian comedy'²⁹ that deals with a new, different kind of content. It was the play's content and not its relatively conventional form that contributed to its premiere at a small fringe venue and not in a mainstream space. For Wandor, however, it was important that audiences should be able to concentrate on the message of the play, and in order to facilitate that she decided to preserve a familiar framework: form. In a sense therefore, the play demonstrates the possibility of renewal within a traditional framework: while the multitude of comic devices offers the audience an entertaining night out, the political message

challenges potentially biased views on sexual politics. However, the play did not achieve commercial success and had a fairly short stage-life, without transferring. It did not receive significant critical attention either, a fact that Wandor attributed at the time to its subject matter and political attitude: 'There's still enormous resistance to anything with overt feminist consciousness, let alone a lesbian feminist one'.³⁰ Looking back on the play, however, she emphasised the play's farcical and sit-com nature, whilst putting forward a conscious political message as well:

The whole idea about who you expect to have maternal instinct or desire for children does not necessarily fall into predictable patterns. So, it was a nurture versus nature debate. Certain feelings which are natural to have because you are a woman or natural to have because you are a man were not always like that, nor should they be.³¹

Symmetrical in structure, the play is centred on two couples - one heterosexual and one lesbian, both desiring a baby - who experience emotions that do not necessarily fall within conventional gender stereotypes. Some of these feelings develop or alter in the course of the play, suggesting that 'what people want emotionally in the family, between couples and about babies, is political', since 'it is not fixed' and cannot and should not be taken for granted.³² As if in an Alan Ayckbourn comedy, the couples inhabit the mirroring spheres of a semi-detached house, separated by a dividing wall. The play's final scene blacks out on the information that the wall will be demolished altogether, as the characters have decided to live communally.³³ Thus, Wandor addresses not only literally shared space but also common aspirations and potentially interchangeable futures. Wandor's metaphor of demolishing the wall also stands for her preoccupation with the establishment of an immediate communication with the audience ('performers and audience united in a particular stretch of time' in a 'collective coming together that inspires people').³⁴

Most of the references to the couples in *AID Thy Neighbour* are given in tandem, building up a constant parallel between the lives of Sandy and Georgina, and Mary and Joseph. For instance, Scene One starts by displaying both halves of the set and locating a member of each couple in the sphere of the home. But while Mary is portrayed in exclusively domestic terms, wearing an apron and making preparations for the forthcoming dinner party, Georgina is introduced more ambivalently. There are no specifications on her clothes; instead she is presented as having feminist and intellectual inclinations as she is reading Adrienne Rich's book, *Of Woman Born*.

Their partners, on their return home from work, are ushered in by the sound of a motorbike and a car. Wandor does not indicate who owns which at this stage, allowing the audience to speculate. Wandor opposes Sandy's apparently feminine look (in a neat dress) to Joseph's stereotypical male image (he carries a briefcase and a bottle of wine). As soon as they start singing on their way in, however, Wandor subverts the associations they transmit by their physical appearance: they both reveal desires and fantasies that will be explored further as the plot progresses. The song they turn around - occurring also in *Care and Control* and in Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* - is the well-known children's rhyme that might have originally been designed to enhance and reinforce gender stereotypes:

SANDY: What are little girls made of/What are little girl made of/Frogs and snails/nd puppy tails/That's what little girls are made of.

JOSEPH: What are little boys made of?/What are little boys made of?/Sugar and spice/And all things nice/That's what little boys are made of.³⁵

By inverting the male and female roles within the song and appropriating the text designed for the opposite gender, both Sandy and Joseph indicate tendencies for experimentation with gender identity. The music to be played during the scene is Doris Day's 'Stepping Out with my Baby', which connotes a variety of 'coming out'

scenarios, including Sandy's and Georgina's lesbianism, but also Joseph's desire to mother and Mary's final confession that she does not have a vocation for mothering.

The parallel snapshots of the couples' domestic details accentuate the striking similarities between their day-to-day routines, thus undermining the assumed supremacy of the nuclear family above alternative family arrangements. In both cases the employee is the centre of attention and ignores the unpaid work of the stay-at-home partner. Sandy is the breadwinner in the Sandy-Georgina partnership, for whom career (teaching) is crucial. Despite her openly gay private life she conceals her sexual orientation in public - a fact emphasised by her distinctive dress code according to the work/home dichotomy. Sandy admits that she has no desire to give birth to children ('God, I wouldn't [...] want to have a baby myself. I'd feel I was being invaded'),³⁶ though she is willing to share the experience as Georgina's partner.

Georgina also has a profession - she is a photographer - yet she is not currently involved in paid work as she is in the early stages of a pregnancy. This pregnancy, however, makes Sandy uncomfortable and jealous as she feels excluded ('It has nothing to do with me')³⁷ by the sheer existence of a clearly identified biological father ('Len helped us out').³⁸ At a later stage, after Georgina miscarries and they contemplate a new attempt for a baby, their main alternative is adoption. Eventually they will settle for artificial insemination by donor (the acronym of which - AID - is encoded in the play's title). Thus Georgina is granted the opportunity to live out the desired experience of giving birth ('I want to have one. Myself.').³⁹ while the anonymity of the father prevents Sandy from feelings of exclusion or the threat of *a ménage à trois*.⁴⁰

While Georgina does not initially mention her pregnancy, Mary cannot wait to break the news that she and Joseph are, in her words, 'starting a baby'.⁴¹ In spite of her charming naiveté, Mary often sends out ambivalent signals concerning her political position. She has characteristics that connote the suburban housewife (utterly feminine and submissive to her husband), yet she too has had a job to which she will eventually return, and shows signs of an emerging feminist commitment (she is a regular *Spare Rib* reader).

Joseph, Mary's husband, appears as the successful career man who in spite of his awareness of feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement is convinced of the legitimacy of men's privileged place in society. He patronisingly calls Mary and Georgina 'girls' and mockingly labels Mary a 'nearly feminist' or a 'demi-feminist'. Whilst distancing himself from the feminine Georgina, he instantly shows admiration and some kind of peer support to the outgoing Sandy, asking about her status-symbol motorbike and even 'outing' his desire to be a Hell's Angel. This latter comment - which Sandy immediately relates to the idea of the closet - functions indeed as another early marker of Joseph's preoccupation with alternative forms of gender identity.

Wandor postpones direct references to the exact nature of the relationship between Sandy and Georgina, though there are indirect clues, such as slips of the tongue, from the very beginning. For Mary, however, the two women living together - whom she finds 'very liberated'⁴² - only recall the times when she was sharing a flat. She even brings up the simile of the 'old married couple', without realising the accurateness of her remark. Eventually, the literal revelation of lesbianism is linked to Georgina's sudden miscarriage, in other words, to a failed attempt at replicating heterosexual practice. When confronted with the facts ('Sandy and I are lovers'),⁴³ it

is Mary, however, who fails to exercise care (to the still poorly Georgina); and for the remainder of the scene Georgina takes over to give support and exercise control, deconstructing Mary's preconceived views on matters of sexual identity. Wandor's deferral of clarifying the nature of this relationship suggests, in fact, the delay society exercises in granting equal rights to non-heterosexual partnerships. In her earlier work Wandor had already paralleled sexual politics and socialist class analysis, and emphasised the comparable struggle of lesbian women and gay men with that of the working class, for liberation and self-expression.⁴⁴

While Wandor problematises the access to parenthood for the alternative family formed by Georgina and Sandy, she seemingly eases the way for Mary and Joseph via their replication of an archetypal parental arrangement (they bear the names of the Biblical couple providing a family for Jesus). Thus, Wandor's heterosexual couple is connected not only to the Holy Family but also - in Julia Kristeva's terms - to the first artificial family, Mary finding herself located on a par with the Virgin Mary: the most famous surrogate mother.⁴⁵ In both cases pregnancy is dissociated from the 'natural' - including the sexual and the biological - and conception is linked to the spiritual (in the case of the Virgin Mary) or the medical (via assisted reproductive technologies, in the case of Wandor's Mary). Eventually however, Wandor's Mary does not emerge as either a biological or surrogate mother as she takes the decision to opt out of motherhood altogether. Consequently Wandor, revisits both a key canonical text and Kristeva's feminist interpretation, making a strong case for the legitimacy of individual choices, either for or against reproduction, irrespective of sexual orientation or the ability to conceive.

Wandor returned to another Biblical couple and the idea of unorthodox parenting in her 1988 play *Wanted*.⁴⁶ Drawing on the story of Abraham and his wife,

Sarah, Wandor brings together one's 'natural' desire for a child, problems of fertility and ageism, surrogate mothering and the latter's labelling in the media of the time as an 'unnatural' solution for infertility. *Wanted* is stylistically more innovative than *AID Thy Neighbour*, featuring an 89-year-old Sarah, a nascent being and what Wandor calls 'an existential angel'. The tone of the play is surreal, interspersed with comic interludes and witty exchanges, diffusing the emotional tension and allowing for moments of fun.

Both Mary and Sarah point out that their reason for wanting a baby is identical to that of any other woman: longing. Abraham is not given a voice with regard to this, while Joseph is reluctant to specify any actual motive, though he mentions that it is different from Mary's. Nevertheless he adds that, as a man, he will 'never know what it's actually like' to have a baby.⁴⁷ This desire to have babies is soon followed up in more detail, in a scene where Joseph addresses Sandy, the only character in *AID Thy Neighbour* who is positive about not wanting children: 'If I had a choice, there's nothing I'd rather do than have [a] baby'.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Joseph considers that he needs to repress his parental instinct in public, since he believes that wanting a baby would be detrimental to his masculinity as it would effeminise him in the eyes of his peers:

JOSEPH: They'd all make jokes about me wanting to change sex - limp wrists held up at me when I go into the pub.⁴⁹

In spite of this preoccupation about public image, Joseph has already subverted his obsession with masculinity. His paraphrase of the rhyme in the opening scene pleaded for the possibility of a softer approach to masculinity, just as Sandy's version asserted a tougher and more outgoing femininity than the current norm.

Whilst having a baby for the lesbian couple is complicated by societal resistance,⁵⁰ for Mary and Joseph it is made difficult by physiological malfunctions.

As in the case of addressing the relationship between Georgina and Sandy, Wandor uses the technique of deferral in order to first suggest and only later be explicit about Mary's inability to conceive. Thus, for instance, Act One, Scene Four captures Mary and Joseph in bed in the midst of calculating the most likely moment for conception. Joseph is featured as a forerunner to the subsequently appearing fertility specialist, constantly measuring with a thermometer and indicating on a chart the instances of 'intercourse on post-ovulatory days'.⁵¹ Wandor contrasts the matter-of-fact mood of this scene with a brief lyrical passage that encapsulates Mary's vision of becoming a mother and thus, achieving happiness. The scene ends with a shift back to Mary's domesticity, substituting the preparation of a gourmet meal with the endlessly postponed production of a baby. Mary's image of the perfect cook also conjures up associations with the perfection - and immaculate nature - of the Virgin Mary, and hence of finding alternative ways for conception: 'Maybe I could *dream* us into pregnancy'.⁵²

Next, Wandor constructs a number of scenes paralleling the couples' interactions with fertility experts. Unlike the plays discussed in Chapter 5 where the physical space of the clinic is emphasised in order to trigger an effect of alienation, Wandor locates the couples' encounters with the medical profession in their own homes. Instead of featuring a patronising male consultant, Wandor's is a sympathetic female specialist who conveys just about sufficient scientific explanation for her patients to understand their treatment. She recommends artificial insemination to both, but while Sandy and Georgina need to obtain the sperm from a donor, Mary and Joseph can first try AIH (artificial insemination by husband).

While for Sandy and Georgina the next challenge is the legal status of parenting, for Joseph it is his exclusion from the process of creation: 'I never though

you'd commit adultery with a test-tube'.⁵³ In no time, his words are re-appropriated and subverted by Sandy, as she helps Georgina use the insemination kit:

GEORGINA: In all my struggles against monogamy in the nuclear couple, I never thought I would aid and abet you to be unfaithful to me with a plastic syringe.⁵⁴

This is already part of an offstage hospital sequence divided into four subsections: each dedicated to a new phase in the couples' quests. Thus, Wandor juxtaposes Joseph collecting semen for the AIH with Sandy assisting Georgina in carrying out the AID; and Mary undergoing her third attempt with the already pregnant Georgina being lectured on single mothering.

The way Wandor collates these images highlights the unpredictability inherent in the physiological aspects of parenthood. Aiming at the legitimisation of lesbian mothering, however, Wandor presents Georgina's conception as totally unproblematic within the framework of AID, versus the heterosexual Mary's medical complications and eventual failure. Thus, Wandor suggests that neither the desire for a child, nor the ability to conceive are matters to be taken for granted or associated exclusively with the traditional nuclear family. Her rhetorical question ('Isn't science wonderful?')⁵⁵ welcomes the existence of medically assisted reproduction, as a means of contributing to everyone's fulfilment, beyond the boundaries of mainstream sexual identity and/or biological limitation.

Wandor's celebratory approach to assisted reproduction gains extra importance in the light of the (then recent) successful birth of Britain's first test-tube baby in 1978. Writing at the dawn of a new era in the politics of reproduction, the issues of power and manipulation had not yet become as central to the debate for Wandor as for the playwrights of the 1990s.⁵⁶ Beside her celebratory tone, however, Wandor does stress the social expectations of the time in relation to mothering. Georgina's interview with the nurse elicits prejudice, ranging from opprobrium

towards unmarried mothers ('NURSE: Here at the ante-natal clinic we call all the Mums "Mrs". Saves the embarrassment all round') and control over their reproductive capacities ('NURSE: Go and see the social worker. / GEORGINA: Social worker? / NURSE: To discuss having it adopted') to ageism (NURSE: Age? / GEORGINA: Thirty-three. / NURSE: Oh, dear. First baby? / GEORGINA: Yes'.)⁵⁷

As opposed to Georgina, Mary not only keeps failing to conceive, but gradually loses her interest in mothering altogether.⁵⁸ In fact, she realises that she does not want to be a mother any longer, as she does not have the right 'vocation'. She claims that for her 'wanting to be pregnant and wanting to have a baby'⁵⁹ are not synonymous, and besides, she does not like staying at home. She symbolically goes back on the pill and resumes paid work at the same time, removing herself from both the constraints of domesticity and submissiveness to Joseph. To make her sudden shift even more poignant, she takes the decision entirely on her own, excluding Joseph for the final time from a position of intervention. Mary's firm resolution ignores Joseph's plea for adoption as an alternative or the thought of trying AID in the wake of Georgina's success. The scene blacks out on the tune 'Just Once More', emphasising Joseph's frustration and his determination to make yet another attempt. Joseph finds himself unfulfilled ('She's left me holding the baby. Or rather not holding the baby')⁶⁰ yet not yielding: 'I warn you, Mary, you haven't heard the last of this'.⁶¹

Though initially stemming from a genuine desire, getting pregnant for Mary has gradually transformed into a competition with Georgina.⁶² This motif is obliquely announced as early as the play's title, via the interrogation and subversion of the Biblical commandment 'Love thy neighbour'. For Mary, Georgina's pregnancy is simply 'unfair',⁶³ and gradually, the very concept of pregnancy

becomes identified with Georgina (the ultimate 'pregnant being').⁶⁴ For Joseph - despite his desire to give birth himself - the quest for a baby has turned into an obsession with performance and a constant fear of inadequacy. It also becomes clear that Mary and Joseph did have different agendas: Joseph really wanted a child, whereas Mary would have only liked to experience pregnancy. However, her dormant feminist awareness comes to the fore at this stage and offers the play's concluding statement, as she hands a baby's sweater to Georgina. This self-made sweater features the feminist symbol of a fist in a circle on the back, confirming not only the end of their feud, but also Mary's determination to assume an active role in shaping her own life from then on.

Embedded into the story of the couples is a *Lehrstück*-like subplot (replicating the conventions of the Brechtian didactic play) aimed at reinforcing the legitimacy of Sandy's and Georgina's desire to have a baby. Wandor introduces heterosexual opinion in the guise of a female journalist, Geraldine, who pretends to be a lesbian. Infiltrating the couple's home in this way, she aims to find out about the contacts through which the couple got Georgina pregnant, in order to expose the public danger they represent. This device acts as 'a kind of revenge-by-theatre over the Press' that had previously held a campaign of stigmatising lesbian mothers.⁶⁵ Wandor presents the confrontation between the couple and Geraldine as a double masquerade; as not only does the journalist impersonate a different self but so do the protagonists. They don the stereotypical roles often assigned to lesbians: Georgina the overtly feminine, domestic role (symbolically wearing over her dress the very apron Mary wore in the opening scene) and Sandy the 'male role of the "huntin', shootin', fishin' lesbian"'.⁶⁶ They seemingly welcome the visit, and pretend to consider Geraldine a fellow member of the lesbian community, in spite of her

numerous gaffes.⁶⁷ While getting her not only totally confused but also hopelessly drunk, Georgina takes a number of snapshots capturing Geraldine in compromising situations to serve as evidence 'about how a respectable woman journalist [is] really a lesbian in her spare time'.⁶⁸ Gaining control of Geraldine's reputation - since her photograph taken in a lesbian environment would undermine her prestige as a supporter of traditional family values - Sandy and Georgina ensure that no revelations will be made concerning their baby's medical history. They win their case by outwitting mainstream prejudice, a possibility that Wandor implicitly recommends for minority groups of any kind.

Wandor's political message is constantly intertwined with refreshing comic moments. In fact, were it not for the play's humour, the scenario itself might equally lead to melodrama. Over-amplifying the stereotypes conventionally associated to lesbian behaviour (especially Sandy's butch image and the scene with Geraldine) Wandor makes fun of the familiarity of the stereotypes but also of the audience's predictable reactions to them. In this manner she is in a position to call attention to both the amplitude and negative constraint of stereotyping while simultaneously re-appropriating it for feminist purposes. She also provides a series of rhyming paraphrases to the well-known seventies slogan - 'A woman's right to choose' - such as 'a woman's right to booze',⁶⁹ 'a woman's right to mousse',⁷⁰ or 'a woman's right to choo-choos'.⁷¹ Sandy coins the expressions 'a women's right to photograph the news',⁷² and 'a woman's right to lose, eh, Geraldine?',⁷³ turning the joke back to a serious terrain. At times jokingly, at times on a serious note, the couple has been taking a stance for women's right to choose with regard to their lifestyle and reproductive capacities. Wandor passionately believed this should be the case; however, the exception she portrayed has not yet been acknowledged as part of the

norm: more than twenty years after the production of the play parenting for non-heterosexual couples is still occasionally censored by legal restrictions and public opinion.

4.3 Surrogate Mothering as an Emblem:

Female Continuum in Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should*

Motherhood can be seen as one of the very important areas of misunderstanding.

(Laura Mulvey)

In 1987 Charlotte Keatley turned to the treatment of surrogacy as a psychological phenomenon, while highlighting the importance and difficulty of maintaining consistent human relationships. By bringing together four characters representing subsequent stages in a matrilineage, she focuses on the problematics of the generation gaps between mothers and daughters, grandmothers and grandchildren. Keatley's characters cover the entire span of the twentieth century up to the late eighties, the time of the play's first performance at the Contact Theatre in Manchester. Apart from this naturalistic aspect, the play operates in a temporal frame of its own. The events are clearly not organised in a chronological order, yet neither do they occur in a completely simultaneous fashion. The result is something 'in between', especially in the scenes that unite all four characters, with their age differences and matrilineal bonds erased. These scenes - acting as a kind of unconscious reservoir of repressed wishes and desires - are set in a space called 'The Wasteground', and feature the characters as children, interacting with each other as peers.

By starting the play with one such scene and interspersing childhood interludes throughout it, Keatley offers opportunities for distancing from the realistic framework of the other scenes. Another effect these scenes help to create is a sense of repetition, of *déjà vu*, also reinforced by the daughters' re-enactment of incidents from their mothers' lives. Keatley's re-enactments, however, are not merely repetitions of the same old story as 'moments occur again and again, differently for each'.⁷⁴ Whenever replaying an event or staging an appropriation of it by and for the subsequent generation, she alters the emphasis. As she has put it herself

The same thresholds are reached in every generation, though very different choices [are] ultimately [...] made, largely due to the different social expectations directed at women in each generation.⁷⁵

Keatley emphasised the idea of interconnectedness between the lives of women across generations, though she also stated that one needed to 'switch back and forth in order to see the connections'.⁷⁶

Keatley presents four different pathways in life, four approaches defined not only by the social and class position of the characters, but also by the possibilities offered by disparate historical moments. She also experiments with the ways in which the various women's lives are either moulded by or organised in opposition to their mother's expectations, and thus treats emotional baggage as both a limiting and inspiring factor. By declining to give any one scene to any one woman, Keatley avoids becoming judgmental and privileging the experience of any particular character. The reunion of all four women as children is an excellent device for subverting chronology and unveiling the intricate ways in which the processes of memory operate. It is both a symbolic and literal way for passing on emotional inheritance that also has the aim of showing 'past experience as simultaneous within us in "the present"'.⁷⁷

Keatley wished to acknowledge the debt women owe to generations of their forebears. Ironically, the very conditions of this play's writing pointed to a lack of awareness as far as women's history is concerned. As Keatley admitted, she was not aware of the existence of other plays on mother-daughter relationships before she wrote hers, not even the Women's Theatre Group's *My Mother Says I Never Should* (1974).⁷⁸ Though she has regretted not having acknowledged the similarity of the titles at the time of writing her play, she stresses that 'Nothing any one writes is completely original [...], what we do with [...] what we inherited [...] matters'.⁷⁹ Both titles include the well-known rhyme also known as a children's skipping song ('My mother said I never should/Play with the gypsies in the wood'), and allude, via female play, to the shared history of generations of women. Like Churchill's earlier *Top Girls*, Keatley's play eliminates the direct presence of male characters on stage, although there are constant references to husbands, lovers and fathers throughout. Keatley claimed that she chose not to represent male figures because she wanted to offer a genuine insight - for the benefit of both sexes - into the dynamics of female relationships in the absence of men. According to Goodman, Keatley's reasons for not representing men were rooted in 'a balancing of power relations', 'a balancing of the sexes on stage' as well as 'the pleasure derived from experimenting with audience expectations', leading to a challenge in the relationship between gender and power.⁸⁰

Keatley has often emphasised her broadly socialist feminist political position and called her own feminism and socialism 'innate'.⁸¹ She insisted recently,⁸² however, that she considered herself 'feminist' only in the terms defined by her. According to this definition feminism is primarily about the possibility 'to achieve the role *you* want to play',⁸³ 'to change the roles we [women and men] have been

ascribed'.⁸⁴ Significantly, feminism for Keatley was something that applied to men as much as to women, and was interesting mainly at a practical level - as opposed to the theoretical and intellectual approach practised in academia. Through the lens of what she termed 'pragmatic feminism', she appreciated that the introduction of minor changes into day-to-day life may transform domesticity for women: from an instrument of 'repression' into a creative and fulfilling activity. Keatley has repeatedly referred to her preference for learning her own feminism by communicating with working-class women in the North of England, and made a political point of continuing to live outside the metropolitan sphere of London in order to lead a more grassroots-oriented life in Manchester.

Just as she contrasts academic and pragmatic feminism, Keatley opposes the worlds of the theatre establishment and fringe theatre. She regrets the reservations frequently manifested towards new work by influential theatre directors and critics, calling attention to the potential danger of losing valuable experimental work. Keatley claims that new playwrights continue to be situated at the low end of the power hierarchy within the theatre, and it is often a matter of chance, not just of perseverance, whether they become successful. *My Mother Said I Never Should* was also initially turned down by several well-known directors on the grounds that it was not a 'real play' owing to its circular time scale. Eventually, Brigid Larmour recognised the play's intuitive nature and staged it at the Contact Theatre in Manchester. From that moment, the play started its uninterrupted journey towards recognition and success.⁸⁵ In this respect, this recalls the itinerary of *A Taste of Honey* three decades earlier. Delaney's play was also denigrated as a naïve text and as an incomplete draft, before being discovered and saved by Joan Littlewood.

Despite the theatre establishment's earlier reluctance, after its premiere Keatley's play was instantly perceived as a work almost everyone could associate with in one way or other and it struck many emotional chords. Its run at the Royal Court in 1989 achieved the highest advance box office sales the theatre had experienced to that date and attracted audiences who had never set foot in a theatre before. Received with enthusiasm by critics and audiences alike,⁸⁶ the play has stirred feedback in a variety of registers, including occasional negative reactions. While Annie Castledine,⁸⁷ for instance, emphasised the honesty and directness of the character-portrayal, for others the play 'got it wrong' by creating the impression that the relationships operated in too harmonious a fashion.⁸⁸ Keatley, however, claims that harmony is only envisaged towards the end of the play, after the characters have gone through very difficult times. She indicates that the character of Jackie, in particular, was designed as a constant reminder of the pressures familiar to contemporary women when trying to lead private lives alongside achieving careers.

Keatley is very sensitive about making a distinction between one's own declaration of political commitment and being labelled by others. She has called theatre a 'political arena' and accused authors who did not acknowledge the political nature of their work of 'fudging it or missing the point':⁸⁹

One thing I hate is women writers not wanting to say that they're feminist. I know it's difficult: that the word 'feminism' needs to be defined all the time, and that's easy to get bogged down in 'post-feminism' and all those things. But when it comes down to it, if you're a woman writing plays you have to acknowledge that a part of you, a part of the person that writes, is representative as well as individual, in a way which is not true for men.⁹⁰

In 1990, however, she made a case against the use of the category 'feminist theatre':

[Feminist theatre] is ridiculous. When men write plays they are not called masculine theatre. I use the word 'female' as opposed to 'feminist' because the latter has such political connotations.⁹¹

Keatley has identified the fairly recent fact of women's substantial presence as playwrights as a reason for the almost immediate labelling of works produced by women as 'feminist'. She called attention to the often-encountered confusion that 'as a woman writing plays [one was necessarily] writing about women'; as far as she was concerned, she was writing 'about life', although women may often have been the characters through whom she chose to represent life.⁹² In her view, the safeguard against superficial compartmentalisation would be 'to flood' the theatre with women directors and writers, so that every point of view would be represented and labels such as 'women's theatre' or 'feminist theatre' would find themselves devoid of meaning.

Despite Keatley's reservations about the term 'feminist' in relation to her work, *My Mother Said I Never Should* has regularly been associated with radical feminist theatre owing to its 'plasticity of time'⁹³ and the experimental nature of the 'Wasteground' scenes.⁹⁴ Brigid Larmour, the play's first director, emphasised the importance of assessing the innovative qualities of this play within the context of its first production and stressed its influence on subsequent authors.⁹⁵ The idea of subverting linear time, however, had been scrutinised extensively prior to Keatley, for the purposes of this section most relevantly in French feminist theory, fiction and drama.⁹⁶ Julia Kristeva, for instance, associated linear time with an equality-feminist project, connecting radical feminism with a cyclical and 'monumental' perception of time, situated outside the confines of time as a teleological progression and, hence, patriarchal domain.⁹⁷ In parallel with the symbolic relevance of Kristeva's divisions, Gillian Hanna of *Monstrous Regiment* highlighted some practical aspects of women's particular perception of time:

It's precisely a refusal to accept [...] that life is linear [...] which has to do with male experience. [...] They are born into a world where they can map out life. [...] It has to

do with a career. It has to do with your work. [...] Now for a woman, life is not like that. It does not have that pattern. For a woman life and experience is broken-backed.⁹⁸

Keatley, however, claimed not to be interested in writing only within the constraints of her own sex and identified male authors - such as Lorca, Tennessee Williams, Stephen Lowe or Anthony Minghella - who used what she called a 'female sense of language' and 'female sensibility'.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, *My Mother Said I Never Should* invites especially immediate identification for a female audience: another factor responsible for the play's public recognition as a feminist piece. 'Feminism' in this case is interpreted rather broadly, and - in Gayle Austin's definition - refers to 'anything that pays attention to women'.¹⁰⁰ As Elaine Aston argued, depending on the particular approach of the performers, several other interpretations of feminism could be highlighted as well.¹⁰¹ She identified three converging trends in Keatley's play: cultural feminism in the stylistically avant-garde childhood scenes that focus on the construction of femininity; materialist feminism in the shifts in chronological time that convey a deconstructive approach to narrative organisation; and bourgeois feminism in the play's realist form and accuracy in historical terms.¹⁰² The naturalistic dialogue that builds up the plot also allows for strong roles and potentially consolidates the play's connection with the tradition of bourgeois theatre. This latter association, in fact, is frequently encountered in productions of *My Mother Said I Never Should*, undermining the play's radical aura by a theatrically conservative spectacle.

While Keatley claims a lack of interest in either theory or political activism, she does emphasise her ambition as far as aesthetic values are concerned. Theatre today, according to Keatley, should be practised again as 'an art form, not a platform' ('I am an artist: I want to make a truly wonderful piece of art'),¹⁰³ insisting

on 'originality', 'artistic daring', 'the avant-garde'.¹⁰⁴ As to writing, the starting point for Keatley should be some source of a 'magical, theatrical, emotional' nature.¹⁰⁵ She did not consider consciously political writing adequate for our times any longer, contending that the political nature of theatre 'has to be as unconscious, intuitive and instinctive as the way in which the writer is political'.¹⁰⁶ In fact, she has expressed her relief at writing at the end of the twentieth century, distant from the protest and anger of the 1970s wave of didacticism and agit-prop. She also rejected the intellectualising nature and middle-class appeal of some recently produced work, claiming that in her understanding 'The most powerful effect of theatre is the unconscious of the writer connecting with the unconscious of the audience'.¹⁰⁷

Throughout her play Keatley makes an attempt at achieving such a connection by presenting the characters in situations directly familiar to most women audiences.¹⁰⁸ The four protagonists are featured at crucial moments of their lives and (as befits Keatley's class thesis) are almost exclusively captured in some sort of manual activity. Closely related to this focus on mechanical actions, the presence of objects on stage also gains a particular importance. The characters are endlessly involved in folding sheets, packing, preparing food or tea, and the conversations occur in addition to or in spite of the primary activity of 'doing' something immediately useful. While, on the one hand, such a juxtaposition of activities can be read as dramatising women's belief that their problems and ideas are not important enough in themselves (as Keatley herself suggests), it also points to the often unacknowledged difficulties women face on the terrain of communication. As in the dinner scene of *Top Girls*, the women present are talking yet not really communicating: none of them actually pays enough attention to the others' comments.

As for the dramatic significance of this non-communication, it is the inability to listen to the experiences of the others that explains most of the uncanny re-enactments of past events. For instance, characters often repeat a line or a fragment of a sentence spoken previously by another woman, at a similar stage in life. Keatley recalls that she was not always aware of such repetitions in the process of writing and that she only realised the effect during rehearsals. Her explanation of the phenomenon leads back to her preoccupation with the unconscious and to the lack of importance as far as theoretically clarifying every single detail is concerned:

Personally I feel very strongly that you are a kind of shaman if you write, you open your imagination to connect way beyond to what you could know in your own life span and that's your job to do that. There is a kind of magic element that comes in. This is why I don't read feminist texts, I don't read any analytical texts on theatre because I don't want to inhibit my ability to do this. I don't read Jung or Freud, I don't read psychology books, I never ever have because I am connecting, I am making the prime substance of plays and it is up to other people to analyse that later.¹⁰⁹

Key objects, such as the piano or the endlessly folded and unfolded sheets are essential to the transformative processes to and fro in time between the various scenes.¹¹⁰ They have been accumulating references to a multitude of historical moments and providing links between characters. In Keatley's own words, the objects 'just resonate with the emotional atmosphere of the lost moment',¹¹¹ instantly conjuring up past sensory experiences. On most occasions they are the only constant presence on stage while the characters embark on their cyclical journeys in time. Objects in general, and the sheets in particular, also create a certain distance from sentimentality and relate the emotional intensity of the present moment with that of events from the past, urging for a re-evaluation of both instances and constituting evidence for the interconnectedness of women's lives. Objects also possess the potential for strong visual effects, explored especially in the 'interplays' between scenes. For example, clothes are chosen to match the fashion of the historical period

of the scene, but their intimate nature is equally crucial: hence they connote growth, family connections as well as personal and social history.

Examining four generations of women related to each other in a direct matrilineal way, Keatley explores the intricacies inherent in mother-daughter relationships.¹¹² In simple biological terms, Doris is the mother of Margaret, who is the mother of Jackie, who in her turn is the mother of Rosie. In fact, the bonds between these women are far more complex: very often the direct mother-daughter relationships are the most difficult to operate in a mutually satisfactory manner. Keatley has made a case against presenting women as either extremely good characters or fantastically evil, as she argues they had predominantly been portrayed in literature. She claims to have a 'consciousness' - that she called feminist - to create a 'full spectrum of roles' for women outside this conventional dichotomy, roles that could occupy the in-between space from good to evil.¹¹³

In conjunction with this aim, the play is far from harmonious and presents the characters through a range of emotional phases that resist compartmentalisation. There are quite a number of moments rooted in emotional distance, even alienation, between mothers and daughters, though scenes of reconciliation often follow.¹¹⁴ Keatley describes the play as a tragedy, claiming that both life and theatre are a combination between the funny and the tragic.¹¹⁵ A major example of the lack of solidarity between the women in the play is the silence surrounding the fact that Doris was a child born out of wedlock. Instead of revealing this information in the context of the unmarried Jackie's pregnancy, to ease her confrontation with social prejudice, both Doris and Margaret pretend that there have never been single mothers in their family. When years later Jackie finds out about the truth, she is told is that 'It wouldn't have made a difference'.¹¹⁶ Ironically, later in the same scene Doris decides

to introduce Rosie into her secret about growing up without a father. Her story presents illegitimacy as a far more common phenomenon than is often documented, although it might also suggest that she did not fully understand at the time that she was illegitimate. Thus, in a sense, Jackie's experience is excluded from their family history twice: one perspective denies it altogether and the other refuses to acknowledge its connections to the past.

The playwright claims that her intention was to ask questions rather than to provide answers. Through this device it becomes instantly possible to open up a number of parallel pathways without necessarily indicating one fixed solution. Keatley posits the idea that through going to the theatre 'we experience the possibility of changing our own lives', especially in the context of her observation that 'Every play [...] is a capsule about society at a [given] time'.¹¹⁷ The play features a range of situations that could be qualified as problematic, while there are equally numerous moments of optimism (cf. the character of Rosie). Eventually, Rosie emerges with the largest array of potential choices, and whatever she opts for will be acknowledged as legitimate; Keatley thus re-affirming the idea that theatre has the capacity to create and should create hope.

Amongst the aspects of family life that juxtapose despair and hope, Keatley dramatises in detail the circumstances following Jackie's giving birth to Rosie. Keatley stresses that Jackie loves Rosie, yet financial difficulties and prejudice against single mothers force her to hand her baby over to Margaret, who thus simultaneously becomes a mother and grandmother to Rosie. The linguistic treatment of this relational triangle acts as a subtle code to the power relations going on at various times between the characters. When the young Jackie and Rosie talk the language used is mostly that between equals (Rosie does not yet know that Jackie is

her mother), whereas the Margaret-Rosie, Margaret-Jackie dialogues clearly encode a hierarchical note. Ironically, Rosie sometimes mentions how unmotherly Jackie is, how she could not even imagine Jackie as a parent: 'You're old enough to be my mum. I'm glad you're not'.¹¹⁸ The older Jackie, in contrast, can hardly withhold her maternal instinct, especially when she stops pretending to be Rosie's equal and treats her patronisingly.

According to the agreement between Margaret and Jackie, Rosie is to be told of the truth about her mother on her sixteenth birthday. Due to Margaret's premature death, however, Rosie finds herself confronted by facts via the accidental discovery of her birth certificate. Her reaction is one of outrage, but also of ambivalence as she suggests that she has always suspected that Jackie was more than a sister. She claims: 'I used to hate you, only I never knew why',¹¹⁹ although she has previously shown an extraordinary admiration for Jackie, directly reminiscent of Angie's fascination with Marlene in *Top Girls*. As a next step to this love-turned-hate relationship, Rosie reinforces her rejection of Jackie - whom she refuses to call 'mother' - but also of motherhood in general, claiming that she will not have any children.¹²⁰ In order to signal the strength of her protest, she announces her decision to move in with Doris; thus, the two characters deprived of fathers and of traditional families find themselves united in a symbolic pact across generations.

This union constitutes the play's most genuine relationship and Keatley establishes a number of correspondences between the lives of the two characters. Doris is already widowed, the death of her husband leaving her without any material inheritance in spite of sixty years of marriage; even her home is left to Jackie. Just as Doris is forced to start a new life, so Rosie too is left to figure out her way on her own. The first encounter between them occurs, in fact, as they clear up Jack's and

Doris's old house after Jack's funeral (Act Two Scene One). While Jackie and Margaret deal with the major business, Doris and Rosie are assigned to sort out bed linen upstairs. In the play linen connotes domesticity, female tradition as well as commitment to the family, and is treated with the utmost respect; yet at this particular moment Keatley picks up a comic thread and allows a moment of fun. Examining the sheets in order to choose which to take away, Doris suddenly decides to cut holes for eyes in some and play ghosts with Rosie. This brief interval in the otherwise hardly ever interrupted work-ethic of the play mirrors the 'Wasteground' scenes, erasing age and status differences and bringing the characters together on equal terms. For a short while both Doris and Rosie are children again, which is to say free from emotional ballast, pain and remorse. Their play is also a compensatory exercise for their temporary exclusion from the world of work. Doris is protected from getting too involved, as she is not only the widow but also considered too old to work hard, whereas Rosie is still deemed too young as yet to be allocated a 'proper' responsibility.

When they begin to live together, Rosie and Doris continue to build on this harmonious relationship. Like the sheets in the ghost-episode, the props involved in the subsequent scenes also connote childhood memories, but while getting dressed as ghosts was an idea suggested by Doris, the later events are engineered by Rosie. In the chronologically latest scene (Act Two Scene Seven) set in Oldham in 1987, Doris and Rosie are shown making kites. This time, however, the kites not only recall the playful times of childhood but also connote freedom achieved by financial independence (Rosie has set up a kite-manufacturing business). The way the two women have learnt to negotiate the co-existence of fun with work opens up a new avenue for women, so far not explored in the play. For everyone else until this

moment, even the transgressive Jackie, work and fun were supposed to be located in two different spheres, never to be found united.

This is also the scene in which Rosie is given the opportunity to find out more about being Jackie's daughter. Having reached her sixteenth birthday, Rosie is entitled to see the explanatory letter written by Jackie before handing her over to Margaret. Rosie, however, has already drawn her own conclusions. Though she is willing to maintain a sisterly relationship with Jackie, she is unable to establish a mother-daughter bond with her: 'If you were really my Mum you wouldn't have been able to give me away!'¹²¹ While refusing to be reconciled with Jackie - and come to terms with her immediate and literal past - Rosie nevertheless continues to be overwhelmed by reminiscences of a more distant and symbolic past.

This fascination also starts while clearing up the house in Oldham, when Doris accidentally comes across an old Solitaire game that used to belong to her mother. Since the game is rather complicated, Rosie is not able to figure out its secret instantly; in fact, she manages to solve it only as she is confronted with Jackie's letter and is consciously resisting its emotional message. Thus, in spite of failing to find harmony with her biological mother, she establishes another connection, with a tradition that runs back generations. Though Rosie's play with the game apparently associates her with individualism and isolation - the immediate symbolism of the Solitaire - in fact, it links her to a community of women. Solving the game that has belonged to generations of women implicitly entitles Rosie to a place in the lineage of her forerunners, 'finding her culture: her female inheritance and strength'.¹²²

Rosie establishes a genuine emotional bond with Doris and is granted the ultimate surrogate mother, when she is already past the age of requiring a carer. Previously, Rosie has experienced a daughter-mother relationship with Margaret,

entirely unaware of the fact that Margaret was her grandmother. For Rosie, Margaret has represented the ideal mother, as opposed to Jackie who completely lacks caring qualities. Keatley suggests that the Margaret-Rosie relationship operates on mutual respect, without overlapping into the terrain of friendship. The reason behind this lack of intimacy might be Margaret's concern not to accidentally reveal the identity of Rosie's birth mother, but also the fact that Margaret has moved on to a full-time job that allows her very little free time. Another cause of Margaret's distant relationship with both her 'daughters' is that she was not planning to have children at all. Margaret first voices this lack of desire in a 'Wasteground' scene. She informs her mates that, 'Me, I'm not having any babies',¹²³ alongside stressing that she is not getting married either. Though she later refutes this personal commandment, she continues to re-emphasise her wish not to give birth. The scene commemorating her engagement to Ken (Act One Scene Seven) is overwhelmed by her enthusiasm for a future in which women do not have to 'waste their lives',¹²⁴ as they can earn a living and avoid childbirth. Paradoxically, Margaret will have Jackie about a year after that wishful statement, and will remain a housewife for the early part of her marriage.

As far as Margaret's own relationship with her mother is concerned, Keatley maps out a number of causes for dissent. Margaret's childhood coincides with the austerity of the Second World War. Keatley utilises literal, material poverty to suggest strictness and a lack of an emotional bond between mother and daughter. As Jackie points out (Act One Scene Two), Margaret had to call Doris 'Mother', rather than the more casual 'Mummy'. Doris does everything she possibly can in order to make her daughter the respectable woman she could not be, securing a proper education for her (for example, she spends a fortune on piano tuition). However, she fails to communicate with her on an intimate level, declining to answer her personal

questions (for instance, Doris and Jack not sharing a marital bed). Doris's ambivalent feelings towards (her own) motherhood are synthesised in her rhetorical question to Margaret: 'What makes you think I wanted children?'¹²⁵ Previously, however, she was talking about the instinctive desire women sooner or later feel for mothering and the difficulty of resisting that urge. Here too Keatley gives the sheets a metaphoric role, as they stand in both for the babies and for this innate desire that, according to Doris, is an essential female trait:

DORIS: (*Cradles the folded sheet.*) I'm talking about the *desire* ... for little arms reaching up and clinging round your neck. (*She buries her face in the sheet, then holds it out to Margaret to do likewise.*) Smell: lavender. From the beds, there. Mother nature is very hard to fight.¹²⁶

On her deathbed Margaret recalls her childhood, remembering her mother's financial sacrifice, but also their lack of privacy and genuine connection: 'One must go to the bathroom and lock the door if one wants - needs - to CRY!'¹²⁷ She recollects her determination to understand parenthood in different terms ('My parents are called [...] Guilt and Duty' - 'When *I* have babies, they will be called Sugar and Spice and all things nice') and to respond to her children's needs more directly ('I will give them everything they want and they will love me'.)¹²⁸ The scene closes with lights fading on her, followed by the sound first of a child, and then of a baby crying. On the one hand, Keatley's ambivalent device suggests the continuation of life after death - the emergence of further generations - and, on the other, underlines the repetitive nature of mother-daughter tensions. Thus, the crying child can symbolise the unhappy Margaret, crying in protest against her mother's authoritarian regime, while the baby connotes her own failure at becoming the perfect mother she would have liked to have herself.

It is the Margaret-Jackie relationship that is presented as the most confrontational of all. But while in the 'Wasteground' scenes (see especially Act

Three Scene Three) Jackie expresses her anger and engineers her revenge by casting a magic spell that will make her mother 'die and rot',¹²⁹ in the naturalistic scenes Jackie is unable to adequately negotiate her relationship with Margaret. Jackie becomes a teenager in the late sixties at an emblematic time for rebellion and contestation. Characteristically of many parents of that time, Margaret is only prepared to address the question of sex or of potential 'dangers' after her daughter has experienced them already. Keatley features Jackie in flared jeans and adorned with badges, listening to her transistor radio turned to full volume, while Margaret is trying to have a conversation with her (Act One Scene Four). As it turns out later, Jackie's preference for her music is a response of a kind to an earlier attempt at communication when Jackie was the one eager to reach out to her mother. At that point Margaret was not available to attend to her daughter, thus losing Jackie's confidence for the remainder of her teenage years.

The two women re-establish mutual confidence following Jackie's giving birth to Rosie. It is Jackie who contacts Margaret, as she cannot cope with nursing Rosie and attending college at the same time. Keatley emphasises that Jackie has the potential to become a good mother but circumstances make her life unbearable. In spite of their past miscommunication, Margaret is prepared to accept the role of the surrogate mother and Rosie is instantly transferred from Jackie's cold, Manchester housing-estate flat to Margaret's and Ken's comfortable London home. The scene in which Rosie is handed over to Margaret (Act One Scene Six), though underpinned by reminiscences of past tensions, is dominated by a powerful sense of women's innate solidarity at such key stages of life as birth. From the moment of Rosie's emergence all previous conflicts become secondary, her wellbeing occupying the priority for both Jackie and Margaret. This instant female solidarity recalls another

statement made by Kristeva, according to which pregnancy and childbirth can be experienced as reunions with one's own mother:

By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself.¹³⁰

The cinematic and potentially sentimental scene of the hand-over captures the pain Jackie experiences when parting with her daughter. Through the extended use of metonymy, Keatley associates Jackie's perception of Rosie with a pair of red socks and a baby dress featuring a rabbit. Since these items stand for the cherished moments Jackie and Rosie spent together, they also constitute the ultimate material evidence of their brief yet intense mother-daughter bond. By deciding to keep the dress and one sock from the pair, Jackie secures for herself both an unmediated access to her past and a potential pathway to re-establish her interrupted maternal link to Rosie.

The red socks are instrumental not only in the maintenance of the Jackie-Rosie bond but also encapsulate references to most members of the lineage. Originally, Jackie used to put them on to Rosie's feet in order to get her to sleep. The socks then move on to become an accessory to Suky, the doll that has belonged in turn to both Margaret and Rosie. Rosie is the only character who has not given birth yet, and states that she does not want children in the future either. By nurturing Suky - the doll on which an earlier generation has practised caring for babies - she has nevertheless appropriated motherhood in metaphoric terms. She has equally appropriated abandonment and hence, unconsciously revisited her own story as well, via the burial of Suky:

ROSIE: (*Digs a hole. Lowers the doll over it, then holds it closer to her.*) I was going to give you away to the Toy Collection at School, d'you know that? Mummies give their babies away sometimes. They do. (*Pause. Slowly lays the doll in the hole.*)¹³¹

In Act One Scene Ten, however, it is Jackie who finds the doll, recently abandoned by Rosie, wearing one red sock. At this uncanny re-enactment of her own past, Jackie symbolically closes the cycle by taking the matching sock from her pocket and putting it on the doll's other foot. When Jackie gets Suky to sleep while lifting her tenderly to her cheek, the gesture constitutes a figurative yet decisive step in the articulation of her re-born desire for motherhood and for a closer contact with Rosie.

For Margaret, the scene in which she takes Rosie over unfolds differently. While Jackie associates every detail and item of clothing with its own story, Margaret in a sense starts with a blank page. In another, however, she is still haunted by the memory of a miscarriage several years back and consequently, sees in Rosie the final fulfilment of her desire for a second child. Margaret only dominates the scene at the very end, after having returned home, as she tries to establish the first contact with Rosie. Margaret is captured rocking a bundle of white cloth that represents the baby, comforting her until she becomes quiet. At first she correctly calls the baby 'Rosie', yet the second time she asks: 'Did you have a bad dream, Jackie?'¹³² - ignoring/choosing to ignore for a moment the lapse of nineteen years between Jackie's being a baby and the present time. Thus, Margaret's substitution of the two names blends the separate characters of Jackie and Rosie into the figure of an archetypal child whilst it also emphasises the interchangeability between mothers and daughters.

In the matrilineage presented by Keatley therefore, transformations between mothers and daughters are perfectly possible, and occur continuously throughout the play. At the blackout, in the space leading up to the next scene, for instance, Margaret suddenly turns and 'billows out' the sheet that was forming the bundle representing the baby (Act One Scene Seven). At this point Margaret is a young

woman, just about to get married to Ken. This interlude, in which the significance of the sheets is changed, connects the scene of transferring Rosie from Jackie to Margaret to the subsequent one in which it is Margaret who is about to be transferred from her parents' home to married life. In this scene Margaret and Doris are folding sheets and the setting is Doris's backyard in 1951. Just as the previous scene marked the start of a new beginning in life for Rosie and Jackie, this one encapsulates Margaret's enthusiastic vision of the future. As Keatley pointed out, a scene was a 'moment of change' in the structure of the play, so each and every one of them captured a stage in the characters' lives that would lead them into a new experience. Margaret, for instance, is planning her escape into independent life, wants to learn to type and earn a living and not to repeat the pattern of her mother's life.

While she is explaining all this to her mother - 'negat[ing] the value of [the] domestic task' - Margaret and Doris are still folding sheets and hence, are engaged in a domestic activity.¹³³ Owing to the accumulating tension, Doris transfers her frustrations onto the physical act of folding until the point when she orders Margaret to pull too hard, and, as a result, Doris finds herself forced to let go her end of the sheet. Thus, according to Cousin, Doris responds in her own symptomatic way to the disjunction verbally initiated by her daughter.¹³⁴ By using the sheet that previously stood for the connection between the lives of the two women to perform emotional disconnection, Keatley suggests the ambivalence and the constant fluctuation inherent in mother-daughter bonds.

As for Margaret's exuberant vision of her future, it is ironic that, apart from her aim of not having children, her enthusiasm echoes Doris's idea of her future (the final scene of the play, Act Three Scene Eight). For both women the main component of happiness is located in getting married and leading a life alongside the

man they love. For the audience and readers, however, it is no secret that neither of the two led a particularly happy life. Margaret and Ken have separated after decades of marriage, whereas Doris and Jack stayed together in order to keep up appearances, but without Jack 'wanting' Doris any longer.

Yet another connection that Margaret's adoption of Rosie establishes is a link to Margaret's miscarriage ten years earlier. At this point it is Doris who acts as a temporary surrogate mother to Jackie, while Margaret and Ken have a brief holiday. Upon their return, both Doris and Margaret are extremely cryptic about Margaret's actual problem, mainly because Jackie, then aged nine, is also present. They use coded language, just as in another scene Margaret refuses to openly address issues of sexuality with the teenage Jackie. Keatley indicates that Margaret had wanted this second baby through Margaret's reaction to a comment made by Jackie. Jackie informs her mother about what she was doing in her absence, detailing her play with the doll:

JACKIE: It's like a real baby, it's got real curled up toes and fingers. I was practising. I bathed it and put it to sleep, and shut its eyes.¹³⁵

This direct reference to handling babies - a practice she has just been excluded from - is too painful a challenge for Margaret. She interrupts Jackie by a firm 'No!' - closing down this topic without further explanation. Her physical stance also changes, as she suddenly removes herself from the hold of Jackie, replicating the standstill introduced by the miscarriage in the continuum between generations.

Doris later returns to the miscarriage, stressing that its main cause was Margaret's haste to get a job, thus questioning the compatibility between professional careers and raising children. The case study of the young Jackie has highlighted the difficulties, social and financial, experienced by single mothers. Although Keatley does not present a version of the plot where Rosie is brought up by

Jackie, she seems to suggest that Jackie, who partly embarked on mothering in order to see 'if [her] theories worked',¹³⁶ would have had entirely different prospects for herself and Rosie without Margaret's help. However, mothering and working for wages proves to be problematic for Margaret, as well. She does not experience economic but a psychological hardship, as she has less and less time to spend with her husband and Rosie, risking marital discord and filial alienation.

In parallel with Margaret's increasing difficulties in negotiating work and family, professional and financial stability reasserts Jackie's desire to fulfil her abandoned maternal role. Following the emblematic moment of placing the sock on Suky's foot, Jackie becomes psychologically prepared to assume motherhood and asks Margaret to let her have Rosie back. Rosie would agree to move in with her 'older sister', though her motivation is more of a fad than an urge to be with Jackie as a person, let alone a mother. Margaret's objections to this move overtly highlight Rosie's lack of filial attachment to Jackie, but covertly suggest Margaret's distress at the prospect of being left on her own. She indicates that Jackie's relationship with Rosie only consists of 'treats', whereas hers is one of regular nurture:

MARGARET: Years and years and years you've lost, Jackie. Birthdays and first snowman and learning to ride a bicycle and new front teeth. You can't pull them back.¹³⁷

In the aftermath of Margaret's death, however, Rosie cancels her plan to move in with Jackie. Unable to accept Jackie as a mother, Rosie embarks on a new surrogate bond instead, with her grandmother Doris. Through the joining of these characters, neither supported by a regular income, one too old and the other too young for considering full-time employment, Keatley returns to the issue of finances involved in parenting. This time she focuses on possibilities for a way out of financial insecurity, such as the entrepreneurial implications of being creative.

Rosie's and Doris's kite manufacturing business stands as an emblem for just such an imaginative and economic creativity, one that not only boosts human relationships but also generates a material framework in which they can flourish.

Keatley juxtaposes a range of options with regard to ways in which motherhood can be perceived and experienced, depending on historical moment, age, education or social class. The matrilineal branch she centres her play on suggests occasional harmonious outcomes, but she does not refrain from uncovering repressed tensions between mothers and daughters that have lead to frustrations and misunderstandings. A major cause of these tensions are the far too frequent silences ('The unsaid and implied, the pauses are just as important as the lines')¹³⁸ and unexplored events that have had serious consequences upon the lives of following generations. As Keatley contended, she was aiming at 'reclaiming areas of lives omitted' and at 'gaps that haven't been written about by women playwrights';¹³⁹ particularly the powerful motivating force of duty and compromise in relation to women's lot in life through her characters who represent the older generations (Doris and Margaret). In spite of the fact that both have considered avoiding childbirth, they have given birth to daughters to whom neither of them got particularly close. In contrast, for the sixties rebel Jackie becoming a mother constitutes a new adventure and another way of exploring inter-personal attachment, but circumstances lead her to abandoning her child. Instead of being Rosie's mother therefore, Jackie becomes her elder sister, while both remain Margaret's daughters. Thus, Rosie finds herself under the surrogate care of Margaret, and after the latter's death, she chooses to move on to another cultural bond rather than the one with her biological mother. Unable to forgive Jackie, Rosie celebrates the viability of surrogate mothering in both relationships: but while in Margaret's case she

appreciates the patronising care, in the case of Doris she cherishes intimacy and friendship. At the end of the day, it is the importance of genuine human relationships amongst women that Keatley wishes to emphasise in her play, both as a necessary foundation to women's survival in society and as a support for a better day-to-day life.

4.4 Conclusions

The two dramatists discussed in this chapter illustrate divergent political and artistic agendas, emblematic for the shifts in feminist thinking and intervention from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s. Michelene Wandor reflects on her preoccupation with realism in her 1978 pastiche West End comedy, whereas Charlotte Keatley emphasises her aesthetic ambitions in what she terms a formally innovative piece of drama, written in 1987. While Wandor deploys in her play a linear narrative that climaxes in a scene of recognition, Keatley deliberately subverts linearity in order to favour a cyclical pattern that parallels the interconnectedness of women's lives. Alongside the so-called 'Wasteground' scenes that erase hierarchies between characters, Keatley's play also features a strand rooted in realism that centres on a female lineage. Though theatrically conservative, this strand has also been accounted radical, owing to Keatley's intense preoccupation with women's experience. Wandor turns a topical issue into explicit polemical drama with an aim of consciousness raising and immediate communication with the audience, while Keatley, emerging as a writer a generation later than Wandor, considers that the political nature of theatre should be located in the unconscious and only be present intuitively.

Both playwrights identify themselves with socialist feminism, yet neither welcomes the frequently utilised 'feminist theatre' label. Wandor finds such categorisations 'useless', while Keatley terms it 'ridiculous'. Nevertheless, both playwrights insist on the importance of maintaining and exploring further the connections between 'theatre' and 'gender', 'theatre' and 'feminism'; yet not in a ghettoised fashion that encourages essentialism. Both argue for the necessity of new work being continuously written and produced by and for women, in order to alter the current gender status quo in the world of theatre. Wandor has particularly contributed to the debate on the role of women in contemporary British theatre, as a theorist, critic and editor of women's work for the stage.

Despite their different aesthetic ambitions, Wandor and Keatley address the issue of parenthood with comparable fascination. For both playwrights parenting, and mothering in particular, constitutes a central facet of human experience that shapes one's life irreversibly. While problematising biological parenthood, *AID Thy Neighbour* and *My Mother Said I Never Should* offer a celebratory support to surrogacy, and treat it as a metaphor for the viability of genuine human relationships. Unlike the sheer submission to the patterns of female biology (as in Delaney's work discussed in Chapter 2), Wandor starts off from a premise of longing and investigates instances of self-conscious intervention to circumvent physiological impediments on the one hand, and societal resistance, on the other. Ultimately, parenthood emerges as something relatively easily available for the lesbian couple, whereas for the heterosexual one it becomes impossible, not only as a result of infertility but also due to a lack of sufficient commitment.

The essence of parenting is defined as a caring - as opposed to a strictly or directly biological - relationship, and is exemplified through an alternative family

structure by Wandor and a female lineage across four generations by Keatley. Nevertheless, in both cases there is a strong sense of doubt with regard to the taken-for-granted harmonious nature of women's communities and an emphasis on jealousy and difficulties in communication. The playwrights also address parenthood as a non-exclusive realm. Keatley transfers the task and privilege of mothering across women belonging to several generations and Wandor explores and legitimises the desire for parenthood coming from non-heterosexual subjects. She also interrogates male attitudes towards fatherhood (including giving birth) and acting as a carer. While Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* connected male caring with homosexuality, Wandor presents a married man who longs to be a father as deprived of his paternal potential by a wife who does not have a 'vocation' for children. Keatley's play only features female characters, though there are constant references to men who have fathered children. Keatley does not address fatherhood explicitly, yet she significantly indicates its absence, including instances of illegitimacy and of inadequate marital relationships. Thus, she also revisits the gender-power ratio on stage, offering an insight into female bonding in the absence of men.

While both plays address parenting and surrogacy, it was nevertheless their subject matter that contributed to a great extent to their divergent patterns of audience and critical reception. Wandor identifies her play's radical content as a cause that hindered audience identification, whereas Keatley suggests that it was the very fact of women recognising their own lives in her protagonists' that made her play such a commercial hit. Though by the mid-seventies Wandor was already an established playwright - whose agenda primarily included the propagation of topical issues - her play was fairly badly reviewed and only had a short run. Keatley, on the other hand, was a first-time author and her play was initially rejected before

becoming one of the most successful plays staged in this country in recent years. After the Manchester premiere it was staged at the Royal Court, followed by innumerable revivals that continue to this day, throughout Britain and abroad, by amateur and professional companies alike.

¹ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986b).

² Cf. the following surrogate parent-child relationships studied in detail in this dissertation: Madrigal-Laurel in *The Chalk Garden*, Geof-Jo's expected baby in *A Taste of Honey*, Axel-Christina in *Queen Christina*, Joyce-Angie in *Top Girls*, Margaret/Doris-Rosie in *My Mother Said I Never Should*.

³ Michelene Wandor, *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*, revised edition, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 138.

⁴ Wandor interviewed, in Lizbeth Goodman & Jane de Gay, *Feminist Stages* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), p. 93.

⁵ Wandor, interviewed by Jozefina Komporály (9 July 1999).

⁶ Her reservations towards Churchill's *Top Girls* constitute the best-known example, where Wandor's criticism only highlighted the possibility of a bourgeois feminist reading - despite Churchill's well-publicised political commitment with regard to socialist feminism - and found the experimental time frame unnecessary to the 'fundamental dynamic' of the play. Cf. Wandor, 1986, p. 173.

⁷ Wandor, introduction to *Strike While the Iron Is Hot* (London: Journeyman, 1980), p. 11.

⁸ Wandor, *Time Out* (21-27 November 1977).

⁹ Janelle Reinelt, 'Michelene Wandor: Artist and Ideologue', in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. by Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), p. 239.

¹⁰ Wandor, *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-war British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 90.

¹¹ Cf. *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972*, (London: Stage 1, 1972); *On Gender and Writing*; *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-war British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987).

¹² Cf. Wandor's rewriting of *Aurora Leigh*, to highlight the protagonist's feminist potential. In *Plays by Women Vol.1.*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen, 1982). First rejected by both the BBC and the National Theatre, the play was eventually performed by the feminist theatre company Mrs Worthington's Daughters in 1979.

¹³ Wandor, in Goodman and de Gay, p. 297.

¹⁴ Wandor, interviewed by Komporály.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Wandor, 1986, p. 138.

¹⁷ Wandor, 'Women Playwrights and Feminism in the 1970s', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, ed. by Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Cf. Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (1993b); Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, eds., *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre* (1996); Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (1995) and *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (1999b); Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (1984) and *Feminist Theatre and Theory* (1996).

¹⁹ Lizbeth Goodman, 'Feminist Theatre in Britain: A Survey and a Prospect', *New Theatre Quarterly*, no. 33., (1993a), p. 68.

²⁰ Cf. Wandor, *Five Plays* (London, New York: Journeyman/Playbooks, 1984).

²¹ Wandor, interviewed by Komporály.

²² Wandor interviewed, in Reinelt, p. 247.

²³ Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre and Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 5; Catherine Belsey, 'Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text', in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (London, New York: Methuen, 1985).

²⁴ Goodman, 1993b, p. 126.

²⁵ Jill Davis's list of lesbian plays was compiled for an unpublished paper, presented at the conference 'Gender, Text, Image: Women in Theatre' (Nene College, Northampton, 19 November 1988), reprinted in Goodman, 1993b, p. 140.

²⁶ In Wandor, ed., *Strike while the Iron Is Hot: Sexual Politics in the Theatre*, (London: Journeyman, 1980).

²⁷ Cf. the reactionary condemnation of lesbian mothering and artificial insemination by the mid-seventies tabloid press.

²⁸ Phrase taken from Mary F. Brewer, *Race, Sex and Gender in Contemporary Women's Theatre: The Construction of "Woman"* (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), p. 12.

²⁹ Wandor, 1986, p. 190.

³⁰ Wandor quoted in Rose Collis, 'Sister George is Dead', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), p. 79.

³¹ Wandor, interviewed by Komporály.

³² Ibid.

³³ This aspect of Wandor's play establishes a direct reference to Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, written a year later, as far as the characters' communal living is concerned. In the case of both playwrights the focus on communal arrangements is a reflection of their immediate connection to feminist preoccupations of the late seventies.

³⁴ Wandor interviewed by Komporály.

³⁵ Michelene Wandor, 'AID Thy Neighbour', in *Plays* (London: Journeyman/Playbooks, 1984), p. 117. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 119.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 129.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁰ A different kind of *ménage à trois* leading to an arrangement of surrogacy is examined in Joan Wolton's short play, *Motherlove* (1987). Wolton does not focus on a lesbian partnership, but her three characters - the infertile Jenny, her fertile sister, Paula, and the surrogate mother, Sara - replicate a comparable triangle of mutual frustrations. (But while Wandor tries to normalise the lesbian couple-donor relationship, Wolton concentrates on the absurdity of the situation and on the lack of communication between her characters.) Jenny is heterosexual and married, yet she is unable to conceive as a result of her age. However, she assumes a considerable degree of agency in the process of getting Sara pregnant instead: replicating Sandy - who carries out the insemination of Georgina herself - it is Jenny who delivers her husband's sperm to impregnate Sara. As a parallel to Sandy's sense of threat because of the sheer presence of Len, Wolton discusses Jenny's jealousy with regard to Paula's fertility, as well as Paula's frustration for Jenny having been their mother's favourite child. The male characters find themselves located as mere suppliers of sperm in both plays - Len literally being commissioned for this service and Jenny's husband not even appearing on stage. As in other plays dealing with parental longing, the babies are denied access to a voice of their own altogether. However, while Wandor forecasts a potentially happy family environment for her alternative family, Wolton presents the baby as a victim and as a mere object of desire. Cf. 'Motherlove', in *Plays by Women*, vol. 8., ed. by Mary Remnant (London: Methuen, 1990).

⁴¹ Wandor, 1984, p. 122.

⁴² Ibid., p. 127.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁴ Wandor, 1986, introduction.

⁴⁵ Kristeva made these points in her essay *Stabat Mater*, where she claimed that the image of the Virgin Mary did not provide an adequate model of maternity; since, with the Virgin Mary, the maternal body was reduced to silence. In *Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini*, she contended that neither of the two currently available discourses on maternity - Christianity and science - are adequate to explain the phenomenon of motherhood. Cf. Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *The*

Kristeva Reader, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986a); and 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez, transl. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980a), pp. 237-243.

⁴⁶ Wandor, *Wanted* (London: Playbooks, 1988), a play written for the Arc Theatre Company.

⁴⁷ Wandor, 1984, p. 128.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁵⁰ Cf. Jill Brown's account on her lesbian pregnancy that 'felt like a contradiction'. She contended: 'I was struggling with the conflict between motherhood and myself as a sexual being and with my internalised lesbian oppression which wrongly teaches us that we are not allowed to become mothers'. Jo Chambers and Jill Brown, 'Two Personal Experiences', *Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions*, ed. by Sue Cartledge (London: Women's Press, 1983) pp. 81-82.

⁵¹ Wandor, 1984, p. 128.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Cf. the discussions on this topic in Chapter 5, especially with regard to Claire Luckham's *The Choice* and Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Break of Day*.

⁵⁷ Wandor, 1984, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Wertenbaker's *The Break of Day* also juxtaposes two couples on a quest for a baby: one succeeding and the other eventually failing. The latter concludes that it is time to give up trying and start making sense of life in a different way, by embarking on another quest, to find out the motives behind events.

⁵⁹ Wandor, 1984, p. 156.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁶² While in *AID thy Neighbour* Wandor features a competition of sorts between two women trying to conceive, Alison Lyssa's 1981 play *Pinball* explores a situation where two women fight for the custody of the same child. Displaying a range of intertextual references - from the Biblical story of Solomon, Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* to Churchill's *Owners* - Lyssa's play eventually grants custody to the lesbian mother, hence reiterating Wandor's supportive stance with regard to the legitimacy of non-heterosexual parenting. Cf. 'Pinball', in *Plays by Women*, vol. 4., ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen, 1985). (Though Lyssa is Australian, I decided to include this reference as her play has been 'appropriated' by British theatre and regularly discussed in works on British women's drama.)

⁶³ Wandor, 1984, p. 137.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶⁵ Jim Hiley, 'Review of *AID Thy Neighbour*', *Plays and Players* (December 1978), p. 32.

⁶⁶ Wandor, 1984, p. 143.

⁶⁷ For instance, she has no idea about the lesbian icon, Radclyffe Hall, or indeed her nickname, John; she does not react to the term 'invert' etc.

⁶⁸ Wandor, 1984, p. 159.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷⁴ Charlotte Keatley interviewed by Lizbeth Goodman, 'Art Form or Platform? On Women and Playwriting', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. VI/22. (May 1990), p. 132.

⁷⁵ Keatley, in Goodman, 1990, p. 131.

⁷⁶ Keatley, Platform Performance and discussion of *My Mother Said I Never Should*, NT 2000 - 100 Plays of the Century series, Royal National Theatre (8 November 1999). Keatley's play - alongside Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*, Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* - was one of the handful of plays by women selected for this celebratory occasion.

⁷⁷ Keatley, in Goodman, 1990, p. 131.

⁷⁸ In fact, post-war British women playwrights have addressed the issue of mother-daughter relationships extensively. Examples include plays as diverse as Nell Dunn's *Steaming* (1981),

Katherine Hayes's *Skirmishes* (1981) and *Not Waving* (1982), Louise Page's *Salonika* (1982) and *Real Estate* (1984), Ayshe Raif's *Fail Safe* (1986), Clare McIntyre's *I've Been Running* (1986), Winsome Pinnock's *Leave Taking* (1987) and Julia Kearsley's *Under the Web* (1987). A broad selection of other plays is dedicated to the celebration of female friendship, often in conjunction with a reinterpretation of history from a female perspective. E.g. Pam Gems, *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* (1977), Tierl Thompson and Libby Mason *Dear Girl* (1983), Jacqueline Rudet *Basin* (1985), Elaine Feinstein/Women's Theatre Group *Lear's Daughters* (1987), Clare McIntyre, *Low Level Panic* (1988) etc.

⁷⁹ Keatley, in Goodman, 1990, p. 138.

⁸⁰ Goodman, 1993b, p. 132.

⁸¹ 'Feminism is extremely digested, it's extremely innate. I never want to consciously think "This scene illustrates this point"'. Cf. Carol Homden, 'Flexing the Playwriting Muscles: Interview with Charlotte Keatley', *Plays and Players* (March 1989).

⁸² Keatley, interviewed by Jozefina Komporály (17 November 1999).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Keatley in interview, in *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwrighting*, ed. by Heidi Stephenson & Natasha Langridge (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 75.

⁸⁵ The play has received amazing feedback from audiences and readers. So far it has been translated into twenty-two languages and performed all over the world by both professional and amateur companies: in the Autumn of 1999, for instance, the play was being translated and rehearsed for staging in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. In the United Kingdom it was most recently revived by the Oxford Stage Company in 1997, it is among the most performed plays in British theatre and is a set text on GCSE and undergraduate courses. Keatley regularly conducts workshops on the play in schools and colleges throughout the country, allowing a new generation of readers to respond directly to the piece but also to encounter a living playwright.

⁸⁶ A different kind of play achieving critical and popular success was the Black Mime Theatre Women's Troop's 1990 production, *Mothers*. This play not only replicated to some extent the reception of *My Mother Said* but also paralleled the play's experimental form and its preoccupation with women's shared experiences. *Mothers* is simultaneously set in several places and time frames - all of which represent, in fact, spaces where women interact or think about their experiences with others - and features three women who impersonate both women and men, adults and children. The play was devised by Black Mime Theatre Women's Troop and was directed by Denise Wong. It was first performed in November 1990 and played at the London International Mime Festival in 1991. Cf. Goodman, 1993b, pp. 168 and 263.

⁸⁷ Annie Castledine is a feminist director and editor of two volumes in the Methuen series of *Plays by Women*. In her production of *My Mother Said I Never Should* she introduced a musical score - based on classical music and Beethoven - that Keatley had not originally intended as part of the play. A director-writer controversy followed until Keatley attended the rehearsal and approved of the music.

⁸⁸ Keatley, interviewed by Komporály.

⁸⁹ Keatley in Stephenson and Langridge, p. 73.

⁹⁰ Keatley, in Goodman, 1990, p. 130.

⁹¹ Keatley, interviewed by Komporály.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Phrase utilised by Geraldine Cousin, *Women in Dramatic Place and Time* (London: Routledge 1996), p. 52.

⁹⁴ The play has also been compared with Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, since both feature all-female casts, have been produced in main-stage venues and investigate different feminist standpoints. Also, both of them have generated what might be termed 'misreadings': *My Mother Said I Never Should* has acquired a radical reputation despite being largely a naturalist piece, whereas *Top Girls* has been labelled as a plea for bourgeois-feminism in spite of its attack on Thatcherism.

⁹⁵ Brigid Larmour, Platform Performance and discussion of *My Mother Said I Never Should* (8 November 1999).

⁹⁶ Cf. Hélène Cixous, 'Portrait of Dora', in Simone Benmussa, *Benmussa Directs* (London: John Calder, 1979); Hélène Cixous & Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, transl. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Julia Kristeva, 1986b.

⁹⁷ Following these two phases - that correspond according to Kristeva to subsequent strands in feminist thinking - a third one is emerging that attempts to negotiate linearity and cyclicity, in an overall attempt at deconstructing binary oppositions and problematising the very category of gender.

In terms of her use of time, Keatley predominantly illustrates the second phase in the Kristevan division, although she also maps out - via Rosie - the potential for a third phase.

⁹⁸ Gillian Hanna, 'Feminism and Theatre', *Theatre Papers*, 2nd series, no. 8., (Dartington, Devon: Dartington College, 1978), p. 8.

⁹⁹ Keatley, interviewed by Komporály. It has to be noted in this context that Cixous herself has acknowledged the influence of Jean Genet on her career and indicated Genet's work as a forerunner to *écriture féminine*.

¹⁰⁰ Gayle Austin, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Elaine Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1999b), p. 128.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 125. Ironically the author's own declared socialist feminism is not directly represented in the play according to Aston's reading. However, the characters' constant involvement with manual work and their sharing of most activities can be interpreted as a socialist feminist statement.

¹⁰³ Keatley, in Goodman, 1990, pp. 130 and 132.

¹⁰⁴ Keatley, interviewed by Komporály.

¹⁰⁵ Keatley, in Goodman, 1990, p. 128.

¹⁰⁶ Keatley quoted by Homden, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ As far as the gender-divided reaction to the play is concerned, Keatley claimed that perhaps men cover a broader spectrum of attitudes, from profound dislike to absolute adoration. She emblematically nominated two members of the audience representing each extreme: a man who thanked her for making him understand his marriage, as opposed to another who urged the necessity of 'locking up the playwright straightaway'. Keatley also conveyed a synthesising note on the issue, equally derived from an informal male commentator: 'The men who understand it, love it; the men who don't understand it, are frightened of it'. (Keatley, interviewed by Komporály).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Cousin, 1996, pp. 53-55.

¹¹¹ Keatley, in Goodman, 1990, p. 133.

¹¹² *Lear's Daughters* (1987), a feminist play devised by the Women's Theatre Group together with Elaine Feinstein, is a rewriting of Shakespeare's *King Lear* from the perspective of the daughters and investigates father-daughter relationships. The play, however, also scrutinises motherhood in a variety of aspects, such as the inability to bear sons (via Lear's wife - Cf. Gems's *Queen Christina*) and giving up one's biological children in order to nurse surrogate ones (via the nurse). The play also discusses the issue of illegitimacy and its immediate bearing on integration into a (patriarchal) lineage. Cf. Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group, 'Lear's Daughters', in *Herstory*, vol. 1., ed. by Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

¹¹³ Keatley, interviewed by Komporály.

¹¹⁴ A comparable trajectory of mother-daughter confrontations followed by reconciliation is dramatised in Winsome Pinnock's 1987 *Leave Taking*. Though Pinnock does not feature several generations (her protagonists are a mother and her two daughters), she also connects back to an imaginary female lineage against which the relationships discussed in the play are implicitly measured. Cf. Pinnock, 'Leave Taking', in *First Run: New Plays by New Writers*, ed. by Kate Harwood (London: Nick Hern, 1989).

¹¹⁵ Keatley interviewed by Komporály.

¹¹⁶ Keatley, *My Mother Said I Never Should* (London: Methuen in association with Oxford Stage Company, 1997), p. 52. All further quotations are taken from this edition.

¹¹⁷ Keatley, interviewed by Komporály.

¹¹⁸ Keatley, p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p. 85.

¹²⁰ It is ironic that all the other characters have claimed at some point that they do not want children either.

¹²¹ Keatley, p. 84.

¹²² Keatley in Stephenson and Langridge, p. 80.

¹²³ Keatley, p. 7.

¹²⁴ Reference to Margaret's statement (p. 30.): 'I'm not wasting my life'.

¹²⁵ Keatley, p. 31.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 81.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Cousin, 1996, p. 59.

¹³⁰ Kristeva, 1980a, p. 239. Following this statement, Kristeva elaborates on the 'homosexual facet of motherhood', through which 'a woman is closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her own psychosis, and consequently, more negatory of the social, symbolic bond'.

¹³¹ Keatley, p. 38.

¹³² Ibid., p. 29.

¹³³ Cousin, 1996, p. 54.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Keatley, p. 23.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

¹³⁸ Keatley, Platform Performance of *My Mother Said I Never Should*.

¹³⁹ Keatley, quoted in Homden, p. 19.

Chapter 5

Parenting in the Post-feminist Nineties:

Desire, Deferral, Denial

5.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates work produced in the nineties and contemporary with the rise of a new phase in feminism. Theorists have extensively elaborated on this phenomenon, defining it in a variety of ways, from a backlash against (second-wave) feminism to 'post-feminism' or 'new feminism', generating controversy in most areas of cultural production.¹ 'Post-feminism' parallels, in fact, some of the claims formulated by backlash theories and shares its preoccupation with highlighting the failure of feminism to adequately explain and/or amend women's role and position within the social contract. Authors representing various age groups and ideological locations on both sides of the Atlantic have engaged with this debate, continuing to contribute to it to this day. Backlash literature has primarily elaborated on a few interconnected themes, which - according to Ann Oakley - include the claims that women are no longer facing genuine discrimination and it is the feminists themselves who amplify minor problems into large-scale concerns and portray them as instances of a male conspiracy against women; that feminism has never really represented the interest of women as a group encompassing all social classes; that feminism is a language of victimisation; and that feminism neglects the personal and social significance of the family.²

Amongst the works revisiting feminist interventions on the institution of the family, Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *A Lesser Life* indicated feminism's deficiencies in

addressing practical support structures for the family, whereas Betty Friedan's *The Second Stage* and Germaine Greer's *Sex and Destiny*³ called attention to feminists discrediting motherhood. Both Friedan and Greer advocated, in Judith Stacey's words, 'conservative pro-family feminism',⁴ not only owing to their nostalgia regarding the child-oriented extended family, but also by comparison with their earlier, liberal and radical, stances. The view that discrimination against women had by now decreased - the problem being a *feminist* 'mystique' as opposed to the previous *feminine* one - was scrutinised by Christina Sommers in *Who Stole Feminism?*⁵. In her attempt at illustrating this claim, Sommers referenced most currently active American feminist theorists and activists, obsessively emphasising the internal contradictions within feminism and the gynocentrism and misandry of its most vocal practitioners. Concern regarding feminism's new celebration of difference was voiced in a less directly confrontational tone by an older generation of British feminists. In fact, Lynn Segal's *Is the Future Female?* and Rosalind Coward's *Our Treacherous Hearts and Sacred Cows*⁶ should not really be classified as backlash works at all, as they did not attack but investigated, interrogating the current lack of ideological identification with the socialist agenda. Arguments against 'victim' feminism have been formulated primarily by younger, US-based, writers. Naomi Wolf contrasted 'victim' with 'power' feminism, and contended that women lost interest in gender equity as a result of feminism advocating such generalising theories as all men are rapists or all women are lesbians.⁷ Katie Roiphe amplified this argument, holding academic feminism responsible for what she termed the 'biased' position regarding date rape and sexual harassment (despite statistical evidence).⁸ The climax to these positions, however, has been provided by Camille Paglia; according to whom feminism was too important an issue to be left in the hands of

women - hence a return to the celebration of men as the founders of human culture became imperative.⁹

When interpreted as a successor - rather than opponent - of second-wave feminism, however, post-feminism represents theoretical diversity and encapsulating a range of political and philosophical stances. As Ann Brooks claimed, by the mid-nineties post-feminism had turned into a 'conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements',¹⁰ including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. Although the origins of the concept and term are not entirely clear, this understanding of post-feminism has emerged as a result of the multiplicity of trends that developed within feminist discourse and the intersection of these diverse approaches with a range of other disciplines. Responding to both internal and external critiques of feminism, post-feminism represents a certain phase of maturity in the development of feminist consciousness, as 'it is able to subject its own premises to an ironical, skeptical and critical mode of analysis'.¹¹ Throughout this dissertation the term will be used in this latter sense, as - via the critical detachment warranted by non-partisan ideological positioning - I establish parallels between simultaneously valid feminist discourses and the multiplicity of approaches co-existing in contemporary British women's theatre.

As it happens, though, none of the playwrights discussed below have come across as major advocates of post-feminism or have engaged actively in the backlash debate. On the contrary, all three tend to display a considerable degree of caution concerning labels and ideological locations, in general, and the precise description of their allegiances to feminism, in particular. While Claire Luckham's early work bore the marks of militant feminist engagement, both Trish Cooke and Timberlake

Wertenbaker have emphasised the periodic need to redefine feminism, because the term has connoted so many different, often contradictory, directions. Having once re-interpreted and hence, re-appropriated, the term, however, the playwrights identify aspects within feminism and indeed, post-feminism, that represent them.

Following Margaret Thatcher's departure from power in November 1990, women's roles in society have undergone extensive reinterpretation. At the time, Britain was marked by a deepening economic recession while Thatcher's privatisation in several sectors of the economy started to threaten the achievements of the welfare state. Owing to massive increases in unemployment, by the early 1990s twelve million people were living 'in poverty or in circumstances so constrained and restricted that poverty is just a step away'.¹² As a direct result of government policies - and of structural changes in the labour market¹³ - an increasing number of women were to join or re-enter the work force, usually in part-time arrangements to accommodate household duties and childcare. It was in this context of atypical employment patterns created by transformations in the economy that Britain entered the 'age of women'.¹⁴

John Major - like his predecessor - did not initially promote women into posts of high responsibility, but in 1991 he supported the principle of 'Opportunity 2000', aimed at encouraging women's appointment into prominent positions. In 1992 Betty Boothroyd became the first woman Speaker of the House of Commons, while Gillian Shepherd was appointed Employment Secretary with responsibility for women. Among other high profile positions, the feminist and socialist lawyer, Helena Kennedy was made a QC and Stella Rimington head of MI5, while Nicola Horlick became known as the token female City high flyer.¹⁵ Several political parties (Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens) have increased the number of

nominations for women candidates, a tendency famously culminating in Labour's 1997 Election campaign, following which over a hundred women were elected.¹⁶ Apart from these well-known examples, there have been excellent opportunities for tens of thousands of other women; nevertheless, these continue to represent a minority. In fact, utilising Liz Sperling's definition - 'post-feminism' as a 'nirvana in terms of equality' - is a state yet to be reached.¹⁷

Alongside inequalities in opportunities and remuneration between male and female workers,¹⁸ there have been difficulties encountered by women when re-entering the labour market or when trying to find other than part-time jobs.¹⁹ Ageing and the re-interpretation of age became increasingly defining factors, as society was faced with finding care and maintenance for its growing elderly population, while acknowledging the appearance of new boundaries for such rites of passage as entering into stable employment, marriage and maternity. In parallel with the delay of the upper limit for these stages - till mid-life in some cases - the lower limit was also gradually extended. While it has become common for women to give birth in their forties, it has also become frequent to encounter large numbers of teenage mothers. Although partially regulated by the 1967 Abortion Act, the issue of women's reproduction rights has continued to be revisited by the medical profession, feminist scholarship and public opinion alike. According to a Harris poll carried out in 1991, '81% of the adult population agreed that women should make their own decision on abortion'.²⁰

Politicians have attempted to respond in a relatively prompt fashion to issues of concern to women, though they often avoided immediate intervention. What they promoted instead was an ethical positioning that might solve problems in the long run: John Major launched his 'Back to Basics' campaign, while New Labour

embraced moral and community values. Despite these attempts at reinventing traditional Christian morality within the family, a clear tendency towards atomisation developed. An increasing number of people have been living on their own, either in lieu of or following relationships. As opposed to the old derogatory label 'spinster', the new term - *femme seule* - connoted independence alongside the deliberate choice of this status.²¹ Although there was no longer one single identifiable women's movement to reunite everyone, issues of sexual politics continued to mobilise women's activism. Often in conjunction with human rights organisations, women carried on campaigning for health issues (treatment of breast cancer, circumstances in which abortions as well as infertility treatments occur) and against domestic violence. Though it was not heralded as a groundbreaking event and did not feature a central ideological thread, the Fourth World Conference on Women - held in Beijing in 1995 - succeeded in a cross-continental connection of women's activism, locating women's concerns in a broader context of human rights preoccupations. As Debjani Chatterjee from the Bengali Women's Support Group in Sheffield claimed:

Many of us would rather not make artificial choices between the individual and the group, between femininity and feminism, and there is a perception that Western feminism has required that such choices be made. Within our sisterhood, there is room for many different points of view and a variety of approaches.²²

How were these changes and choices represented in UK women's theatre?

Despite the cuts in arts subsidies by the Thatcher government and the subsequent difficult times for touring companies especially - 'closure' being regarded as 'a hallmark of the early 1990s'²³ - women's playwriting intensified throughout the nineties. As Mary Remnant commented in 1990

Despite the obstacles [...] it is apparent that women playwrights are gaining confidence, both in their work and in the notion that it is possible to be a woman and write plays.²⁴

The three playwrights chosen for investigation in this chapter, Trish Cooke, Claire Luckham and Timberlake Wertenbaker, illustrate both the multiplicity of stances laid out by Chaterjee and the confidence expressed by Remnant. Their plays, written between the turn of the decade and the mid-nineties, feature protagonists who are recognisable individuals, located in their own cultural contexts, whose experiences are duplicated by a range of other women. Their deeply intimate problems are reflected and amplified by their environments, broadening them into statements about their times. All three plays discussed here feature thirty-something, relatively successful, professional women. Sal (in Luckham's 1992 *The Choice*) and Tess (in Wertenbaker's 1995 *The Break of Day*) are journalists, Nina (*The Break of Day*) is a singer/songwriter, and Dynette (in Cooke's 1989 *Back Street Mammy*) is an interpreter. In some respect all the protagonists display character traits of nineties women: they govern their lives independently, despite living in partnerships, and aim at a genuine combination of career and family. The women, however, manifest contradictory reactions towards the importance and maintainability of their professional careers once maternal desire takes dominance over them.

Although Nina and Tess can look back to an involvement with the women's liberation movement, by the time they appear in the play they have lost their interest in political engagement and have become predominantly family-oriented. For Sal, career continues to be constantly important, even after she decides to have a baby, as she does not see a conflict between her two commitments. Dynette's case combines the two extremes: her teenage persona represents a firm separation between a potential career and motherhood, while her mature self advocates coping on both the professional and family terrain. The individual life stories scrutinised by Cooke, Luckham and Wertenbaker are also representative for larger social contexts; as the

playwrights investigate the core stories through a multitude of lenses, including family (in all three plays), class (Luckham and Cooke), race (Cooke), the medical system (all three) and post-colonial ideology (Wertenbaker). Wertenbaker defines feminism as humanism; she opens up women's dilemmas for universal scrutiny and considers them not only as *herstory* but also in relation to *history* and male experience. The protagonists' struggle for motherhood is inscribed, therefore, into a struggle for identity in changing historical and cultural conditions. It is equally a struggle for agency and for the ability to choose a preferred status or even statuses, either in succession or in simultaneity.

Each of the three plays documents an external intervention that disrupts the fulfilment of parental ambitions: a baby is longed for, but cannot be obtained. Cooke's teenage heroine in *Back Street Mammy* terminates her pregnancy as a result of her (stronger) intent to comply with her family's expectations. Though interrupted, Dynette's desire for a baby is not excluded from the play; she is also shown at a later stage in life: professionally successful and happily married with a child. However, this second self is contrasted with another - mature - woman Jackie, who cannot have the baby she is yearning for. The idea of locating two women in parallel is also taken up by Wertenbaker in *The Break of Day*, where Tess and Nina manifest a similar longing for a child despite biological difficulties. Eventually, only one of them is successful in obtaining a baby, while the other is forced to give up her quest, an outcome that generates an even stronger desire in her: to understand the motives behind events. Just as resignation is not an acceptable form of compromise for Tess, the loss of Sal's baby in Luckham's *The Choice* is equally impossible to come to terms with. Though this is the play where the quest for a child at first seems most likely to succeed, it is also the one that best exemplifies the manipulative potential of

the medical profession. Eventually, the term 'choice' turns out to refer not so much to the protagonist's freedom of decision as to the power inherent in medical surveillance.

5.2 Mothering as Cognition, Mothering as Desire:

The Trope of Replication in Trish Cooke's *Back Street Mammy*

Teenage sexuality and pregnancy has featured extensively in the work of several black British women playwrights, including Trish Cooke's *Back Street Mammy*,²⁵ Christine George's *Family Bliss* and Grace Dayley's *Rose's Story*.²⁶ George and Dayley examine the issue of unplanned pregnancy - in the context of broken marriages and generation conflict in *Family Bliss*, and of an ultra-religious family background in *Rose's Story*. In general, the family becomes a 'site for conflict', often with open confrontations and estrangement between the generations. A well-known example in this sense is Winsome Pinnock's *Leave Taking*, a play scrutinising the generation gap between a mother and her daughters in a British family of Caribbean descent.²⁷ Apart from family issues, here Pinnock also explored double cultural identity - British and Caribbean - another major concern for black and ethnic minority playwrights. In Pinnock's words, for British-born playwrights who had inherited a West Indian cultural tradition,²⁸

Issues of identity were of pressing concern, the idea of being trapped between certain dualities: migrant/native; 'black' culture/'white' culture; being caught between two cultures and belonging to neither.²⁹

However, Pinnock equally called attention to the fact that such plays 'would have some political implication whatever they were about', since so few plays by black playwrights were produced: 'The play becomes representative, and it could not be otherwise when there is little to complement or contradict it'.³⁰

The relatively small number of black-authored plays staged in nineties Britain is a direct reflection on the existing tensions in current race relations. Despite increasing attempts at political correctness colour constitutes a delicate and unresolved issue, and it will perhaps continue to remain so until it ceases to be primarily addressed in the context of violent riots and crimes. The most intense recent investigations into race relations have emerged in the wake of racially motivated incidents, the 1981 riots in Brixton and Liverpool's Toxteth and the murders of Stephen Lawrence (1993) and of Damilola Taylor (2000), respectively. Lasting over a number of years, the investigation and inquiry into the Lawrence murder has irreversibly shaken Britain, and though violence on the streets has not stopped, it led to a public acknowledgement of racism in the Police force. Despite being formally concluded, the case continues in a fictional format having been dramatised - and broadcast on prime time television - under the title *The Colour of Justice*.

Originally directed by Paulette Randall for the Temba Theatre Company at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith (1989) - after a staged reading at the Half Moon - Cooke's *Back Street Mammy* was revived by the West Yorkshire Playhouse's Courtyard Theatre, in a season of 'contemporary' plays (1991). An actress as well as a writer for television, radio, theatre and film, Cooke has produced a body of work at the intersection of different genres and media. She wrote three plays for the stage - *Back Street Mammy*, *Running Dream* (written for the Theatre Royal in Stratford East, subsequently staged in Dominica) and *Gulp Fiction* - before taking a 'conscious decision' to only write for the theatre when chances for getting the work performed are relatively high.

You can write a lot of plays and then you find that they do not get performed. I do not really like writing just to see it on paper. I like to see whatever I had written in

the form that it should take. If it is a performance then I really want it to be performed.³¹

Though women's writing for the stage intensified, interest in staging this work dwindled throughout the nineties. In Pinnock's words, 'there was a time when the black woman writer was sexy', followed by times when directors would only go for the 'safer commercial bet':

The really scary thing [is] to realise that as a writer, you are dependent on individuals to make the work happen. It doesn't matter how much you write, it has no power if people don't allow it to be heard.³²

In such a climate, Cooke has moved on to the area of children's books and radio plays, where she is regularly commissioned. Nevertheless, she continues to be interested in the medium of theatre, both as a writer and an actress.³³ She is equally interested in writing more for television and film and hence 'reach a wider audience' - despite her regret that theatre 'seems to be dying' while 'television, video and film take over rather than run alongside theatre'.³⁴

Back Street Mammy was the first play that Cooke wrote with no particular audience in mind. It was a piece that she felt she simply 'needed to write', producing several drafts and 'exploring different ways of telling a story' until the final version was commissioned and staged.³⁵ On balance, the play generated a positive critical and audience response;³⁶ however, Cooke did not follow this tested path towards further (potential) success. She has re-used certain devices from the play, like the chorus, yet she made a point of going beyond where she had gone before:

For me, it is all a learning process; I start writing my plays from different points [of view]. I enjoy experimenting.³⁷

Back Street Mammy was hailed as 'new blood in the theatre' because Cooke looked at 'old issues through the eyes of a British-born black generation'. It was greeted as a 'surprising' play - 'poetic, tolerant and optimistic' - that rediscovered 'preoccupations that have not been fashionable in the theatre since the 1960s: the

guilt of sexual awakening, the oppressive burden of the older generation, the strength the child needs to fly the nest'.³⁸ Thus, Cooke's 'post-feminist' theatre returns to the basic issues of identity and self-expression that marked the fifties, but in the context of a changing multicultural society where these concerns are more complex. Though seemingly grim in tone, Cooke's writing is, in fact, 'rich with warmth and humour, with fond fellow-feeling for the frustrations of family life and the emotional roller-coaster of puberty'.³⁹

Alongside re-figuring issues of content, Cooke also reinvented the teenage female protagonist in contemporary British women's theatre. Apart from the figure of Jo in *A Taste of Honey* there have been hardly any landmark young female heroines in plays by post-war British women, and Cooke emphatically acknowledges the influence of Delaney's play on her work:

It was one of the first plays that I ever saw; a touring company came and presented it at our school, and I was so inspired by it. This obviously shows in my work - I could just relate to it because it was Northern and the character felt real.⁴⁰

Angie in *Top Girls* is not a protagonist in the conventional sense: she is a catalyst for sharpening the binary opposition between Marlene and Joyce, rather than an agent in her own right. Rosie in *My Mother Said I Never Should* is such a figure, but she is not the sole heroine. In most plays by the British women playwrights I have studied, the dominant female characters are, like their authors, mature women, carrying a large baggage of personal experiences.⁴¹ The present of their stage time usually mediates between an intensely lived past and a challenging, yet equally complicated, future. Very often they are unable to live the future as they would wish, as a result of the past. In particular, the protagonists examined in this chapter experience major difficulties in their attempts to have a baby precisely because of their earlier life-style choices and because they delayed conception too long.

With regard to the generation split, Cooke's play is structured along two parallel strands. One features the teenage Dynette (aged sixteen) - discovering the facts of life, getting pregnant and going through a termination; and the other shows her mature self (aged thirty and mother of a child) - who reminisces about her forced termination while witnessing a childhood friend's longing for a baby. Although the two time-strands are clearly differentiated, Cooke's play conforms only partially to the norms of naturalist theatre. A number of scenes crosscut the two strands and could take place in either⁴² - subverting the hegemony of chronology - and she brings in a Greek-influenced chorus that reflects on events and challenges the protagonist.

The mature Dynette's invocation of the aborted baby, as well as the teenager's prayers, constitute the emotional thread of the play, uniting and fully justifying the two-strand-structure. In Jeffrey Wainwright's words, 'Both speeches convey real news - the discovery and expression of a profound complex of emotions'.⁴³ In fact, the very brief yet extremely powerful relationship between Dynette and her terminated baby is the most rewarding inter-personal bond she has experienced ('I've never been so close to anyone before in my life'.)⁴⁴ Dynette's interactions with the chorus - acting in succession as a manifestation of social pressures, the voice of Catholic morality, and a key to Dynette's own conscience and subconscious, 'as watchers and voices in the head'⁴⁵ - constitute a similarly powerful though not equally intimate relationship. Starting from a naturalistic environment and a realistically plausible protagonist, Cooke then introduces devices characteristic of presentational rather than representational theatre, thus opening up the dilemmas encountered by Dynette the individual, and granting them broader significance. By overlapping past, present and future and getting a choral voice to respond to the protagonist's concerns, the play attains symbolic dimensions, and transposes

Dynette's story into the domain of the universal. This aesthetic approach indicates another feminist inheritance displayed by Cooke: in terms of an anti-naturalistic theatre language that Jellicoe helped create and which can now be taken for granted by most young playwrights.

Although Dynette belongs to a large family, she finds that genuine communication is almost impossible along blood links, including her mother. As if in an alternative family arrangement, Dynette has two confidantes instead, two surrogate mothers of a kind: her elder sister Jan and her school friend Jackie. With them Dynette can address intimate issues - other than her future career - and expect the certainties she so badly needs. Cooke claims that, lacking her mother's co-operation, Dynette is 'forced to look elsewhere' in her quest for answers: 'I think that's what's driving her, she just wants to know'.⁴⁶ Since both figures act as role models for Dynette, Jackie's outgoing nature as well as Jan's early motherhood will prove most misleading for Dynette who reads every statement literally. Her experimentation with casual sex is a mere reaction to what she thinks all her friends are doing and conveys her desperate attempt to act and hence, be like the norm:

CHORUS 1: She wanted to know what she was missing. She wanted to know what IT was like.⁴⁷

Despite her above-the-average intellect, Dynette does not establish a direct connection between the one-night stand and pregnancy. In a sense even on the terrain of sexual encounters all she really wants is knowledge, finding out what it is all about:

CHORUS 1: Then it happened to her. Whirlwind romance? Well [...] not exactly like the magazines or films or the books. No flowers. No champagne. Just the not knowing. That was the exciting part. That was IT.⁴⁸

Thus, the major goal she is after is the gathering of experience and the achievement of a certain sense of liberation resulting from cognition:

DYNETTE: [I]t freed me/From the rut I was in.

CHORUS (*1 and 3.*) For a moment for a second she was free.⁴⁹

In Cooke's words, all Dynette wants is 'to grow up and to be knowing'.

It seems to her that 'everybody knows something about sex, about being grown-up and she is just innocent, and she wants to lose that innocence. By losing that innocence she unfortunately gets pregnant, and hence she is in the same situation her mum was.'⁵⁰

Nevertheless, when she finds out about being pregnant she is first tempted to go for it and discover the state of motherhood. In many ways this extends her desire for cognition even further, as after having experimented with sex now she hopes to have an insight into giving birth.

By becoming a mother she also expects to be recognised as an adult. Having been destined for a career, however, Dynette is offered completely different avenues to follow, from which early pregnancy is radically excluded. Cooke emphasises the lack of solidarity between Dynette and her female lineage, the latter disproving of her deviation from the determined route. Instead of welcoming her re-enactment of the standard fate of women in the community her mother (Maria) pretends not to realise that Dynette is pregnant and keeps on urging her to study ('Don't follow me Dynette. Is not a life for you.')

MARIA: You can learn. Anyway you have the brain and can do anything you want.

DYNETTE: Can I? What if I don't know what I want?

MARIA: What you mean? (*Pause.*) What on your mind Dynette? No better you don't talk. [...] Listen. [...] Don't do like me.

DYNETTE: Mum I [...]

MARIA (*not letting DYNETTE interrupt*): But you smart, *you* wouldn't be foolish like your modder.⁵²

Maria is so concerned with her obsession of success that she avoids the issue of abortion even after it has taken place. She euphemistically stresses the 'nice break' Dynette must have had at Jan's place, while Jackie also denies full acknowledgement of the pregnancy ('[*You*] can't be pregnant. Can yer?').⁵³ It is only Jan who does not

engage in any exercise of pretence. Yet even her reaction is but partially supportive, as it involves a different form of denial and leads to medical intervention and a termination:

JAN: [Y]er not gonna tell her [their mother]. I've got some money [...] some money I was putting away for Tania. [...] I'll take you to a private clinic.⁵⁴

Emphasising the strong formal bonds within Caribbean families, Cooke investigates the limits faced by the individual female subject in a decision-taking process. Dynette is only granted agency when she appropriates her pregnancy (in its early stage): neither before - when getting pregnant - nor after - when being taken for an abortion - is she guiding her own actions. In other words, the teenage self of Dynette is a site for acting out the wills and desires belonging to others, while she is denied her own voice. This denial is exercised via silence by her mother, via lack of sufficient attention by Jackie, via seeming support (yet, in fact, psychological pressure) by Jan and finally, via clinical intervention by the medical profession.

The play is permeated by an extremely lively, immediate atmosphere, echoing the authenticity of Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*. Here is another Northern working-class environment, yet Cooke features a Caribbean family settled in England and confronts two generations. The older generation's vernacular is opposed to the regional accents of the younger characters, highlighting what one reviewer called the amazing 'linguistic richness represented by the strong accents' of West Yorkshire and the Caribbean⁵⁵. Dynette also speaks in a register closer to Standard English, which is the linguistic note of the chorus. Thus, Cooke marks on yet another level the difficulties in communication between generations. The chorus acts as a 'commentary to underline Dynette's adolescent awakening as, in the context of a Catholic upbringing, she is torn between her conflicting desires and the opinions of friends and family'.⁵⁶ Though consisting in turn of the different supporting

characters, the chorus appears as an impersonal voice that challenges Dynette at crucial moments in her rite of passage from innocence to experience. In this sense, it is crucial that it should transmit its straightforward confrontation of Dynette in a contrasting register to the family's compromising passivity.

The second strand features Dynette at the age of thirty, having fulfilled her professional ambition - now married and the mother of a one-year-old child. This self displays a range of post-feminist reminiscences, although Cooke does not find such a label particularly helpful. In fact, she does not find any categorisation relevant, be it in relation to her characters or herself. She emphasises that she is a black woman writer, which for her 'suggests from its very nature being a feminist writer'.⁵⁷ She starts from the premise that 'men and women have different qualities, are equal but not the same' and contends that 'if feminism is basically accepting' [this difference] 'then I would be a feminist'.⁵⁸ As for the kind of theatre she is writing, she is again not interested in categorising labels or ideological definitions, such as 'feminist theatre'. Her major preoccupation is located in storytelling and in character portrayal, often achieved as a result of observation and personal experience. Cooke recalls that although the idea of *Back Street Mammy* had existed since a friend of hers got pregnant while still at school she did not dramatise it until she went through a similar experience herself.

And then, when I was pregnant with my eldest son, I could relate a lot better to the choices Dynette had to make, I was able to feel the pain a bit more.⁵⁹

Cooke warns, however, against emphasising the autobiographical, despite the potential links to herself, her family (a constant source of inspiration) or her environment; she claims that everything is eventually distilled into fiction.

In contrast to Dynette's teenage longings, in the second strand it is Jackie who is in focus. Ironically, it was Jackie whom Dynette tried to imitate as an

adolescent; now it is Jackie who craves Dynette's marital happiness and motherhood. According to Cooke the parallels are there 'in order to magnify what each particular episode is saying and offer a different point of view'.⁶⁰ But while in the teenage section Dynette chased a fake ideal, Jackie's longing is now a profound emotional trap because she feels the ticking of the biological clock ('We're thirty Dynette! Thirty!' 'I can't wait any more!').⁶¹ Jackie's priority is to have a child as soon as possible: 'I want a baby!' 'I want a kid now [...]', 'I can't wait any more!'⁶²

Instead of elaborating on Jackie's desire to mother, Cooke flashes back to the past and reconstructs Dynette's initial pregnancy and termination. Thus, she simultaneously reconnects to the foundation of Dynette's current parental fulfilment and investigates the taken-for-granted though not necessarily desired aspect of teenage fertility. The shift between the two strands is engineered via associations around the anniversary of Dynette's abortion. In fact, it is the mature Dynette's prayer addressed to her 'little God' - her aborted baby - that evokes events that happened more than a decade earlier. There is an overwhelming sense of the illicit, generated not only by the actual moment when sex takes place but also by the scenes preoccupied with adolescent fantasies:

DYNETTE: Sorry God Sorry
 Sorry God Sorry
 Please forgive me I'll never
 I'll never. (*She genuflects.*)
 Forgive me Father for I have sinned.⁶³

The remorseful note of this early invocation forecasts the intensity of Dynette's repentance after her sexual encounter and ultimately, after her abortion:

CHORUS 1. She went to church and begged. Begged God for forgiveness. Promised she would never do IT again if only this time, her one and only time, she could get away with it.⁶⁴

DYNETTE: (*kneels at the candle holding the rosary in her hand.*) Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.⁶⁵

Cooke also adapts a popular rhyme - famously utilised by Keatley and Wandor - to convey Dynette's sense of guilt and to transmit the power of surveillance of one generation above another: 'My Mama said I never should/Play with the gypsies in the wood'. This rhyme also complements the presence of song - and rap, in the original production - and choral elements, emphasising a ritualistic dimension throughout the play.

Cooke follows the heightened emotional intensity of Dynette's rite of passage that reaches its climax in the moment of abortion and complete loss of illusions. In fact, it is not the termination as such but Dynette's coming to terms with its moral acceptability that transforms her. Having realised that she cannot achieve the peace of mind she was hoping for (via knowledge and passage into adulthood), she instantly acknowledges the need to reorganise her priorities and claim another right of agency. However, to do so she and the play must revisit and re-evaluate her multiple cultural belonging, which has both shaped and inhibited her life. In other words, the complex network of her roots - as a Northern, working-class, second generation West-Indian and especially Catholic, woman - requires an urgent re-negotiation of her position:

DYNETTE: [Abortion] to me it means I'm going to lose my God. Everything I've been taught to respect. The unquestionable God's laws.⁶⁶

As she puts it herself, she is 'changing' - first in a physical and then a spiritual sense - and realises that she has found a new governing principle, 'a new God', her own, that directly leads to discovering the existence of 'choice'.

Thus, it is agency and choice that will ultimately grant her knowledge and access to adulthood. The fact that she eventually achieves a career and is able to give birth, at a moment when she is prepared for mothering, reinforces the adequacy of this new regime and seals the failure of any former individuation. In Dynette's

words, she has only 'postponed' the baby's birth, since throughout the entire period between the termination and the birth of her actual child she has found refuge in the special bond with her aborted baby:

DYNETTE: I gave you death before I gave you life: knowledge before ignorance. And love. I gave you love.⁶⁷

Cooke clarifies what Kate Harwood called the 'strong moral complexity' of the text:⁶⁸

To her the baby, herself and God are all one, but she is also able to separate them. It is a thought process that she goes through that helps her to forgive herself in a way. She knows that she has done wrong, but this is the only way she can live with that, by saying that she has just postponed, rather than killed, anything.⁶⁹

Although Dynette has the strength to exercise her right to prioritise one option above others, she needs to justify this option to the inquisitive chorus:

CHORUS (2 and 3): So you think you have the right?

DYNETTE: To determine my own life, yes.

CHORUS (All): You are forgetting the life of the baby.

DYNETTE: There is no baby.

CHORUS 3: The 'baby' will always be there. You will always be a back street mammy. A mother without a child. An orphan mother...

DYNETTE: I thought I had a choice.

CHORUS 3 (All): You have a choice. What is your decision?⁷⁰

Influenced by Greek theatre, this passage of intense question-and-answer exchanges utilises stychomythia, while also establishing a parallel with Roman Catholic rituals:

Having had a Roman Catholic upbringing it seemed only natural to incorporate the style of the choral response used in a Mass to emphasise Dynette's guilt.⁷¹

The analogy with a non-European tradition, however, is also crucial:

It is similar with African theatre, as well. It gives more strength. I thought that the chorus in *Back Street Mammy* acted as basically Dynette's conscience, outside and inside of her, she cannot get away from it, she cannot do anything in private. It is guilt basically, and using the chorus was a good way of getting that across.⁷²

The ideas of abortion as an ultimate form of transgression in terms of Catholic morality and of Dynette as a 'back street mammy' are juxtaposed to the acknowledgement of choice. The ritual of exorcism leads to an acceptance of past

events and re-institutes the termination as a mere fact of life. 'My body. My life. There was never a child involved. I had an abortion',⁷³ or in Cooke's words:

She forgives herself basically. In the Roman Catholic religion you go to confession and you get absolved of all your sins if you ask for forgiveness. That is the method that Dynette uses. She asks God or the baby or herself whether she can postpone the birth. She says sorry for what she has done and asks for forgiveness. Through that she is able to go on although it is still there, as part of her life even as an adult. She was able to move on because of the religion she was trying to get away from. She uses that to help her to move on.⁷⁴

At the very end of the play Cooke returns to the adult Dynette, at work, removed from her former dilemmas. The brief re-appearance of Jackie at this point potentially returns the plot to events that took place moments earlier: thus investigating women's desire for parenting in a context of external denial. This triggers an ambivalent ending, as Jackie's mere presence connotes a certain defiance of the trap of time but also an acceptance of the possibility that she might fail altogether in becoming a mother. However, not only Dynette but also Jackie has moved on; suddenly she does not see her age as the worst obstacle any longer: 'I'm thirty, not dead!'⁷⁵ She does not explicitly give up on maternity, yet she suggests that time is not the sole issue for her any more. Like Dynette, Jackie is also likely to find some sort of fulfilment in the future, and Cooke offers optimism. Cooke does not reveal the precise nature of this potential fulfilment, yet she implicitly suggests that Jackie might have discovered her 'own God' too - her own principle of achieving emotional balance.

5.3 Disability, Eugenics, Reproduction:

The Individual versus Medical Interference in Claire Luckham's

The Choice

Claire Luckham's plays - *Scum* (1976), written in collaboration with Chris Bond for Monstrous Regiment, and *Trafford Tanzi* (1978),⁷⁶ featuring a man-beating woman wrestler - associated her name with radical feminism and labelled her a feminist playwright. The latter play especially, became an icon of feminist playwriting as it appropriated a male space of action and transformed it into a sphere for a woman's self-expression. The metaphor of wrestling was used by Luckham to portray 'the struggle against gender-specific oppression and conditioning';⁷⁷ connoting physical action to the conventionally static female body introduced a focus on transgressive female energy and ritual.⁷⁸ Luckham originally wrote this play for a working-class audience in Liverpool, aiming to establish immediate audience involvement.⁷⁹ Set and performed in a wrestling ring, *Trafford Tanzi* re-enacted the tension and physicality of such spaces, the audience being encouraged to respond to events taking place onstage. Generally divided along gender-lines with regard to their support or opposition to the protagonist, no audience stayed indifferent to Tanzi's struggle to become a wrestler. While for the majority of viewers and critics Tanzi's egalitarian quest signified a genuine interaction between liberal and working-class feminist commitments, the play was also read as a reinforcement of patriarchy - since it appropriated some of the latter's governing rules. For Michelene Wandor, despite the 'interesting mixture of the bourgeois and the radical feminist, on the territory of working-class experience and popular cultural reference points',⁸⁰ there was no

socialist dynamic, the play being a mouthpiece for bourgeois feminism owing to its failure to challenge the dominant socio-economic order.

In *The Choice*,⁸¹ Luckham continued to be 'interested in women's powerlessness'.⁸² However, instead of locating women in situations where they are able to take 'responsibility for their own lives and challenge [this powerlessness]',⁸³ *The Choice* investigates the ways in which women are denied responsibility. As her protagonist, Luckham now created an independent woman, with a career of her own, who is taken over by the manipulative power of the medical system in the course of her pregnancy with a potentially disabled baby. Originally someone with very strong opinions - on women's careers, family, babies, her own pregnancy - she is gradually eliminated from discourse and ends up reduced to the status of a mere object for scientific scrutiny. Devoid of agency by the end of the play, she finds herself unconsciously acting out the decisions taken by the medical institution and consequently, aborting the baby labelled unfit for survival.

Rather than being interpreted in feminist terms, *The Choice* was perceived as an issue play about disability and was instantly categorised alongside other contemporary plays that addressed mental or physical handicaps.⁸⁴ A key reason for this appropriation was the well-publicised fact that Luckham's own brother was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome. Another factor was an equally factual reference: the case of a paediatrician in Derby who was charged with allowing a baby with Down's Syndrome to die. Luckham discovered the case of Dr Arthur while researching the topic and integrated some of its details into her play. Nevertheless, she also stressed that despite the sombre elements she aimed to be positive about Down's Syndrome, and disability in general. Luckham warned, however, that this play did not conform simply to the label 'play on disability'. *The Choice* was in fact,

wrongly categorised as a case of a feminist writer giving up on the task of writing about feminism - as Luckham felt obliged to emphasise:

Is not just a play about Down's; it's about trying to talk about birth - about giving life and what choices and responsibilities are involved.⁸⁵

The play features a couple, a consultant, a midwife, a woman writer - in whose space the action takes place - and the voice of the writer's brother. Apart from the couple (Sal and Ray) none of the other characters have individual names; they are designated by the generic denomination of their profession (The Consultant, The Midwife, The Writer). This device has the capacity, on the one hand, to suggest that these characters act only as a support system to the drama lived out by Sal and Ray, but on the other to amplify any statement made by them to a universal level. Only the handicapped character, referred to as 'the Writer's Brother' disrupts this pattern, as he not only lacks a profession but also appears deprived of almost any agency.

Luckham wrote the play for a studio venue, with Sal and Ray at the centre of attention, the Consultant and the Midwife 'forming a circle round them, and the Writer encircling them both'.⁸⁶ The figure of the Writer opens up a meta-theatrical dimension, as she acts as a director/orchestrator. Her scenes appear as stage directions, comment - another modern-day chorus - on the couple's interaction with the medical profession and connect the two Down's Syndrome-related strands (the experience of her own brother and the diagnosis of the couple's baby). It is tempting to interpret the Writer as Luckham's alter ego ('You could say that the writer figure in the play is me', 'the Writer's experiences are very much my experiences'), yet she is obviously fictionalised:

The minute you start putting things down on paper you start involving another character. It becomes fiction. [...] That's a very odd thing about writing - you think you're exposing yourself, yet in putting it down it becomes something else completely.⁸⁷

According to Luckham, the topic of the play was 'something [she] knew [she] would have to write about'.⁸⁸ However, it was written as result of a commission from Annie Castledine, then artistic director of Derby Playhouse, while Luckham was an Arts Council-funded Writer in Residence. Luckham explained that she had always taken inspiration from her own experiences although she had not so far placed them at the very core of her plays: 'Everything I write tends to be based somewhere on something personal'.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, she also highlighted the fact that the importance of personal experience sublimated into writing should not be over-privileged:

Just because I have had children and I have a brother with Down's Syndrome doesn't mean that I am the only person who could write about these issues. I would hate to suggest that men couldn't write about childbirth, because they haven't experienced it.⁹⁰

In this respect she is reminiscent of Charlotte Keatley - who stressed that not having given birth herself had not hindered her from dramatising generations of mothers and the principle of mothering.

Nevertheless, the play's development reflected and successively put in focus its disparate elements: the personal, the feminist and the issue-based drama. Originally, *The Choice* was entitled *Dear Embryo*, and it centred on Luckham's own experience with pregnancy in later life. She was subjected to the same amniocentesis test Sal goes through, and the all-clear light to proceed with the pregnancy was given only in the fourth month. Luckham grew increasingly preoccupied with the idea of potential health hazards and with the ways in which vital medical information is withheld or overdosed to patients. A later version - already planned for the Studio space at the Salisbury Playhouse where the play was eventually premiered after Castledine's departure from Derby - was called *I, Barrie*, and re-located the figure with Down's Syndrome to the core of the play. Castledine, however, felt that this central emphasis on Barrie meant that 'audiences would be influenced emotionally,

so the play would become just another play about an underprivileged person'.⁹¹ Following Castledine's advice, Luckham eventually rewrote the play in its present form - polemical rather than merely emotional - acknowledging the director's creative input and her capacity to generate confidence in her abilities as a writer.

Thus, the story of the Brother is only mentioned in a number of elliptical sequences and appears as an interlude-cum-intertextual reference throughout the play, intersecting the scenes dedicated to the couple's quest for a baby. Although the severity of the medical condition is not entirely clarified, a binary opposition is developed between an image of normality (attached to the Writer) and one of deviation from this norm (the Writer's Brother): 'I was the perfect baby. And he wasn't.'⁹² The opposition is further sharpened by the revelation that Down's Syndrome had run in the family ('a strange shadowy tribe of them living in my family')⁹³ and that, knowing this, their mother had tried to obtain an abortion. It is eventually climaxed by the Writer's reminiscence of the obsession with the purity of the race in Nazi Germany:

THE WRITER: He was born in the war, and when I think of him being stuck in a category it is impossible not to think of Hitler [...] somehow I can't think of what he did with the categories that weren't acceptable, that didn't belong.⁹⁴

Although, after the failed attempt at termination, the family tries to relate to him as to a 'normal' child, the discourse referring to the Brother continues to map out difference, either via the politically incorrect 'mongol' or the medicalised 'high grade'. While acknowledging the gap between handicap and health, the Writer's initial patronising approach rooted in guilt gradually gives way to genuine care, and leads to her celebration of the equal validity inherent in different standards of life:

THE WRITER: It was a relief to know that he was doing something in his own right.⁹⁵ He leads a full and useful life. [...] It is the quality of life that is important to all of us.⁹⁶

It is the story of the couple, however, that takes up the bulk of the play. Sal is a journalist and Ray, an illustrator. Sal has not considered pregnancy so far, and it was her partner who initiated this attempt and conveyed more eagerness to adapt to the foreseeable changes in their lives. Though not facing the excluding diagnosis of barrenness, Sal is already penalised for being in her mid-thirties. Medical analysis instantly reveals that there might be something wrong with the foetus she is carrying, a possibility which would be significantly smaller had she been younger. However, Sal and Ray do not even consider surrogate parenting. They focus on Sal's pregnancy and, subsequently, on speculations as to whether they would be able to cope with a disabled - possibly Down's Syndrome-affected - baby.

Luckham offers generous space to the medical profession. The Consultant, fully aware of his crucial role in his patients' quest for a baby, projects himself into a role of god-like control.⁹⁷ He urges the supremacy of science ('Science can work miracles') and connects medicine with power: 'They see me in control of knowledge and therefore powerful'.⁹⁸ Though insisting that she had no intention of stating 'what is right and what is wrong', Luckham is clearly offering a serious critique of the medical system and its patronising power ('You know what obstetrics is?' 'I hope you, at least, found out about Down's Syndrome'.)⁹⁹ She presents it as an exclusively male sphere of influence, in which women's voices are considered irrelevant. During check-ups, for instance, the Consultant addresses both of them or ignores Sal completely, as if Ray were more in the know as far as the development of the pregnancy is concerned. He focuses on the mechanistic aspects inherent in the act of giving birth, using such images as 'steel womb' or 'robot birth';¹⁰⁰ paralleling Emily Martin's scientific metaphor of the body as a production factory. According to this metaphor, consultants and physicians act as the technicians who run the body

efficiently and profitably, as in conditions of capitalism and the free market - which, in their turn, have provided economic support for the medicalisation of birth.¹⁰¹

Though Luckham does not refer explicitly to instances of immediate opposition, it is impossible to ignore the eighties campaigns against medical surveillance during gestation and childbirth. This wave of protest included such events as the '*Birthright Rally*' in April 1982 at the Royal Free Hospital or the claims of well-known individual obstetricians - such as Wendy Savage, Peter Huntingford or Michel Odent in France - in favour of birth as a 'normal event'. The latter had equally spoken out against the use of technologies 'for specific instances of high risk being extended to routine use'.¹⁰² Sal, however, does not find the resources to oppose medical intrusion directly, in spite of real-life petitions by thousands of women, midwives and childbirth educators against control over pregnancy and birth. Despite her instinctive disagreement with medical recommendations, Sal is unable to contest and de-centre the privilege of the 'scientific approach' - a phenomenon deeply embedded in twentieth-century Western culture. In Emily Martin's words,

Medical culture has a powerful system of socialisation which exacts conformity as the price of participation. It is also a cultural system whose ideas and practices pervade popular culture and in which, therefore we all participate to some degree.¹⁰³

Sal's reserved attitude illustrates, in fact, another claim made by Martin, according to which women 'represent themselves as lacking a sense of autonomy and feeling carried along by forces beyond their control'.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Sal's case is also a reflection of feminism's failure to deal in a satisfactory manner with the negotiation of power in pregnancy and childbirth. While women's rights to contraception and safe abortions have been 'won' in most areas of the non-Catholic Western world, comparable rights with regard to childbirth - especially concerning autonomy and access to control - are still needed. According to Ann Oakley's and Hilary Graham's research, the entire concept of 'normality' in matters of birth is a

source of controversy in itself. They talk about two divergent 'frames of reference', where 'normal' signifies entirely different things for each party. For women, 'normal' conveys 'the sense of their individual bodies having the capacity to take on pregnancy and labour, in every sense, physically and emotionally',¹⁰⁵ as a 'process rooted in their bodies [...] not in a medical textbook'.¹⁰⁶ For doctors, on the other hand, it is connected to the medicalisation of the body and success is quantified by the emergence of a healthy baby at the end.

Luckham's Consultant repeatedly calls Sal 'Mrs. Winger', despite the fact that she and Ray are not married. As it happens, marriage constitutes an obsession for Ray as well, mainly in conjunction with the assertion of his paternal rights. Immediately after Sal confirms her pregnancy, he proposes. He sees making her pregnant as a kind of victory,¹⁰⁷ but also as the start of a period of redundancy for him. He instantly asserts the need for 'staking out his claim' and making sure that he will be 'around for this baby'.¹⁰⁸ This idea of the baby as property will continue to be a component of Ray's interventions till the very end of the play: 'The final touch is that you are having my baby. That is the icing on the cake'.¹⁰⁹ He will be the one less open to arguments for termination and will manifest hardly any anxiety regarding the baby's potential disability. All he needs to hear from the Consultant is reassurance that there is going to *be* a baby, a palpable object of desire for him to possess. He hardly spends any time with Sal in the early stages of her pregnancy as he is always at work, keeping a record of foetal development. This exclusion of Sal's perception on the evolution of the foetus is reminiscent of the misogynist idea that women are only vessels for the male seed and temporary shelters for the foetus to develop, as children are first and foremost the offspring of their fathers.

At one point he also reveals (first to the audience only) his jealousy at her pregnancy: 'How can I help being so jealous?' 'I'm pregnant with jealousy!'¹¹⁰ This longing for attention appears as a genuine womb-envy, a desire to be included in all stages of the process of creation:

RAY: I want to be the one with the baby, in there, seeing the doctor, getting all the attention. I wouldn't mind being sick. I want to be the mother of a foetus.¹¹¹

His drawing of the book of the baby acts, in fact, as a compensatory act of creation: part fantasy, part recording of events, the book is his version of pregnancy, his way of approaching the experience he is biologically excluded from. When he eventually decides to share his book with Sal he also reveals his jealousy at not being able to mother himself ('I'm jealous, Sal, of you having this baby.')112 As if in compensation, Sal also admits her own jealousies: on the one hand, at Ray's ability to sublimate experience into art, and on the other, of the baby itself - safe, protected and supposedly happy:

SAL: You can draw. These pictures [...] you know, they've made me feel jealous of it [...] swimming in my foetal waters [...] passing through evolution [...] safe in there. Happy, contented creature.¹¹³

Despite this idealised vision of safety inside the womb, when examined from a strictly medical perspective, the baby's future is a lot less secure. Already before Sal's medical check-up, Luckham suggests that something might already be wrong. The Consultant seems to be over-eager to offer Sal the latest developments in screening technology and sets in motion an entire 'cascade of intervention'.¹¹⁴ Obsessed with the idea of the body beautiful in a climate of perfection¹¹⁵ - as well as with the perpetual reinforcement of his authority over his patients - the consultant projects himself into a trance-like state when carrying out the testing. His understanding of the functions of the human body is utterly mechanistic, and for him

medical practice and healing are mere solutions of problems posed in some kind of riddle:

CONSULTANT: I want to get that foetus and have a jolly good look at it. I don't want there to be any possibility that there might be something wrong with it. Something I haven't detected. [...] If there is anything wrong I can either attempt to correct it, or I can tell them to forget it and start again. [...] Slowly they are turning into problems to be solved, problems I can solve, as long as I don't think of them as people.¹¹⁶

This stance establishes a direct link to Sheila Kitzinger's observation on male medical control and the rise of obstetrics:

The history of obstetrics is a record of men's struggle to construct a system of scientific certainties on which the management of labour can be based, and to eliminate women's inconvenient emotions, their 'old wives' tales', and the passion of giving birth.¹¹⁷

The Consultant uses the phrase 'difficult decision' right after the first test - before any results have been obtained - followed by the likes of 'chromosome abnormality' and 'genetic defect'. Eventually he reveals that the suspected disease is Down's Syndrome, which connotes the idea of 'lovely loonies' to Ray, and of 'slow learners' incapable of 'great intellectual achievement' to the Consultant. In the opinion of an advocate of non-medically supervised births, such an obsession with technology is also located in the medical belief that in the late twentieth century - 'given the information and technology' - almost anything can be done: 'It is this belief which drives hospitals to greater and greater lengths to make birth more predictable, more controlled, more assured of outcome.'¹¹⁸ As an ultimate clarification, another test - amniocentesis - is recommended alongside the information that should the results be positive instant abortion can be available.

This is the stage in the play that articulates most clearly the medical tendency to split the pregnant woman-foetus unit and concentrate on the foetus alone. According to Rosalind Petchesky,¹¹⁹ this move was made possible by the development of various technologies of visualisation, such as ultrasound, capable of

producing an image of the foetus without indicating its location in the womb. Aided by such images, obstetrics has created the illusion of being able to interact with the foetus directly - without the mediation of the pregnant mother - women finding themselves therefore, in yet another instance of marginalisation. This idea of the free-floating, independent foetus has been taken up subsequently in both the visual arts and advertising. Rosemary Betterton explored in detail 'the emergence of foetal personhood as a cultural category', and provided analyses of such controversial images as Wrangler (1986) and Benetton (1991) advertisements that showed fetuses wearing jeans and passing not only as self-sufficient miniature adults but also as aspiring fashion icons.¹²⁰ She also quoted Ann Kaplan's observation with regard to the absent mother in popular culture and film: 'Fetal interpellation manifests a new form of the old desire to absent (or deny) the mother'.¹²¹

Though indirectly suggested even earlier, the actual reference to abortion -the irreversible separation of baby and mother - unleashes Ray's rebellion, rooted in his instinct of conservation. His crescendo of retorts first includes both Sal and himself ('We don't want an abortion'), then intensifies into the exclusive '*I* don't want to make any bloody decision',¹²² and culminates in his attack on the entire medical profession: '*They* have an investment in things getting worse, in illness'.¹²³ It is clearly Ray's, rather than Sal's, attitude that recalls the climate of what the sociologists Stimson and Webb termed 'atrocious stories'.¹²⁴ According to Ray, he and Sal are positioned in the know, while the Consultant manifests professional incompetence. In trying to get Sal to keep the baby against all odds he continues to deploy a broad range of options within a vocabulary of pressure, from emotional blackmail to religious discourse.

In spite of Ray's strong opposition, Sal does opt for the test, as she cannot resist finding out more about the condition of her baby and the disease ('Finding out makes it all more manageable'.)¹²⁵ The positive test result, however, undermines Sal's self-belief and redirects the focus onto the Consultant's claims: 'No one plans for a child that is not beautiful and as perfect in every way as it should be.' 'One doesn't expect to have to settle for second best.'¹²⁶ Previously remote, the choices regarding the baby's future become a matter of immediate concern for Sal, although when provoked to single out one option, the Consultant and the Midwife back out:

CONSULTANT: I think it is right that the choice is yours. We are here because we have been trained to help you, to give you the relevant information. That's all. Science is about progress. We represent that progress.¹²⁷

In their private lives, however, they did make a choice and opted for contradictory possibilities. The Midwife gave birth to a child, while the Consultant decided to have none: 'We don't need more children for survival'.¹²⁸ The fact that the Consultant fails to convey an ultimate solution, however, does not erase his previous manipulation of Sal: 'It is perverse to insist on having [a child] that isn't [healthy], that will soak up care and attention'.¹²⁹

Unable to relate to the baby any longer, Sal's only remaining choice is termination - in spite of Ray's attempts to dissuade her. Thus she excludes him from the decision-making process, denying *him* choice: 'I've made my decision. If you don't like it [...] that's it. I won't be able to love her. It.'¹³⁰ In his final attempt to persuade Sal not to abort, Ray again projects himself into the role of gestating parent. He pleads with her to think of other issues besides perfection and to perceive the baby as if it were only *his* offspring, asking her to have it for *his* sake. Though Sal proceeds with the abortion - witnessing the 'death of a dream'¹³¹ - Ray continues to work on *his* 'dream' of the baby. Before destroying the picture of the baby and hence, performing his own symbolic abortion, Ray communicates for the last time

with the child he has been fantasising about throughout the play: 'Dear Embryo. I hope it isn't too lonely up there, among the stars.'¹³² This sentimental encounter finally provides an opportunity for Ray to move on to a new stage, liberate from his obsession and come to terms with facts.

Having brought the Sal/Ray plot full circle, the final scene returns to the Writer at her Brother's birthday party. The Writer makes it clear that her Brother - despite suffering from the same syndrome as the aborted baby - has managed to lead 'a full and useful life'.¹³³ To illustrate this, the closing speech of the play is taken over by the Writer's Brother himself, speaking on video. This is the first and only time he appears in the play, and though his presence is mediated by technology, it emerges in the context of bridging divides. Luckham invites the association with family videos - thus emphasising the idea of community and shared leisure - whilst she intersects multiple means of communication: dramatic, filmic as well as emotional, all connected by the operation of memory. For Paul Allen, this speech constituted a major highlight, as 'it broke down the rules of theatre' and 'it did the trick of removing one of our protective skins'.¹³⁴ Evoking the origin of the Norman kings of England, the Brother's allegorical speech confronts the plot of responsibility, commitment and desire, which ended in failure in Sal's and Ray's case, with a story of chance, coincidence and survival:

THE WRITER'S BROTHER: William was a bastard, and the lovely Arlette [his mother] had a dream. When she was pregnant with William, she had this dream. She dreamt that a big tree was growing inside her, with huge spreading branches, and the branches went across France and into England. It was the Norman Kings of England's family tree. I like family trees, don't you?¹³⁵

Through this striking parallel, Luckham suggests the instrumental role of chance and hazard in human destiny. In spite of their commitment to each other and to the responsibilities of parenting, Sal and Ray are refused the opportunity of becoming biological parents, mainly due to the emotional blackmail exercised by an

overcautious representative of the medical profession. In opposition to this, the legend of William the Conqueror presents an entirely accidental encounter and desire. Arlette's unplanned and unobstructed pregnancy has led to the founding of a dynasty of kings and an entirely new and irreversible turn in history.

In an age aspiring to political correctness, the protagonist's refusal to come to terms with disability might seem anachronistic. Luckham claimed that she was not seeking a judgmental reaction:

You have to be very careful not to emotionally overload - that's why I hope I've been able to keep it humorous. You don't want to freak the audiences out with a subject like this.¹³⁶

Her target was 'to start talking' publicly about such issues, 'along with childbirth and sex education';¹³⁷ and to facilitate such a follow-up discussion she supplied factual reference: 'If you don't know the facts you can't get involved'.¹³⁸ Luckham constructs her play on the parallel obsession with finding out as much as possible about the potential Down's Syndrome-related flaws of a foetus and the presentation of a case with such a diagnosis. As the Writer contends, there is an urgent need for more information on disability in order to negotiate relationships between the able bodied and the handicapped: 'If there was an element of choice in the situation I wish I'd known about it'.¹³⁹ The story of the Writer's Brother is presented as a case of survival and coping; yet his life celebrates the arbitrary rather than the deliberate engagement with the principle of deviation from the norm. Thus, the possibility of choice - at least on a medical level - is shown to function on a random basis, and decision taking is located ultimately with those in positions of authority and power. Sal requests the abortion, but she might have acted differently had she been so advised. Her final reassurance to Ray that she still wants a family, however, has the intensity of defiance and suggests determination: to exercise her own choices from

then on. It also reinforces the conclusion to a feminist rewriting of the history of obstetric thinking:

We must displace the hegemonic grasp [of obstetrics] with models of practice based on our multiple realities as subjects.¹⁴⁰

5.4 'Benevolent Colonisation':¹⁴¹

Maternal Longing and Cross-culturalism in Timberlake Wertenbaker's

The Break of Day

I don't think people know what they mean when they say 'radical feminist'. I don't know how I got that reputation. People used to ask me if I was a feminist, or a feminist writer. Well, of course I'm a feminist, but what does that mean? What's so good about feminism is that it is so broad.¹⁴²

Known for her strong views on theatre - which she sees as a forum that 'can make one question certain assumptions that one has',¹⁴³ - Timberlake Wertenbaker has made an equally strong point of not embracing any particular feminist direction. She has acknowledged the importance of feminism as a cultural and political intervention; however, she regretted the fact that feminism has been 'a rather class-bound, national rather than international movement'. Wertenbaker added that 'feminism has done very little for the position of women all over the world',¹⁴⁴ problematising the terms 'feminist' writer and 'feminist' playwright. In her view, the labelling of writing as feminist was not necessarily more than a rhetorical activity that simultaneously clarified and obscured meaning, thus establishing a connection to an earlier statement by Patti Gillespie:

All feminist theatres are rhetorical enterprises; their primary aim is action, not art. Each company is using theatre to promote the identities of women, to increase awareness of the issues of feminism, or to advocate corrective change.¹⁴⁵

Wertenbaker similarly pointed out her reticence towards the term 'women's playwriting': she did not like 'this compound term'.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, she stressed the

importance of producing plays by women and about women, especially in the context of what she called the 'more reactionary' nineties.¹⁴⁷ Like most of the playwrights I have discussed, Wertenbaker conveyed her dissatisfaction with the gender ratio in theatre managements. In her view 'Theatre is still run, and the scene is still commented on, by men';¹⁴⁸ and although there is no guarantee that having more women in key responsibilities would bring about a radical change, she would recommend trying:

We particularly need women playwrights, because they have fewer prejudices, fewer foregone conclusions than male playwrights. It's important for women to put themselves out there.¹⁴⁹

Despite Wertenbaker's dissatisfaction with the situation of female playwrights, it is crucial to stress that as a result of her and Caryl Churchill's success, there has been an upsurge in unsolicited manuscripts coming from unknown women writers. These two cases of public acknowledgement have 'aroused a certain confidence in writers who [...] felt that there was a possibility that they might [break through]'.¹⁵⁰

In a different context, Wertenbaker did connect women's work for the theatre with feminism and humanism. Talking in 1998 about 'the explosion of writing from women' she called attention to the fact that these works were 'blatantly feminist and by definition made men uncomfortable'. However, she also argued that - like feminism - 'Women's plays [have] moved into more humanistic, complex concerns', reaching unprecedented audiences.¹⁵¹ She has stated that feminism was above all 'humanism and the questioning of authority', claimed that men should get as much out of it as women,¹⁵² and said that the 'basic message of feminism was one of humanism and the recognition of giving everyone an equal chance'.¹⁵³

Wertenbaker's work, nevertheless, has addressed central questions for radical and liberal feminism alike, especially the acquisition of a voice versus the silencing

of women and women's absence from or presence in history. For Wertenbaker theatre has the capacity 'to make one listen': as long as one 'learned to listen more attentively or noticed certain things, then theatre changed people', even if all this happened on a minute scale.¹⁵⁴ She saw theatre as 'a good tool to clarify and isolate things that might be worth isolating and look at them in detail', without necessarily perceiving [it] as an instrument 'to make sense of the world'.¹⁵⁵

Wertenbaker has successfully experimented with the rewriting of classics - texts generally male-authored and often based on myths. She has been known as a playwright addressing 'major issues in a complex way',¹⁵⁶ whilst setting her plays in spatially and temporally distant environments. She made a particular point of approaching such issues ('big subjects', as she referred to them), as opposed to some of the earlier work by women that was exclusively rooted in female experience. In her view, the stake in this matter has been a certain symbolic battle over territories with male playwrights. Writing about women's lives - according to Wertenbaker - was seen as something 'safe', as it did not interfere with the preoccupations of most male authors. Branching out of female experience, however, immediately stirred adverse reactions and was not considered 'acceptable', as thus the territory of universal subjects would have to be shared between writers of both genders.¹⁵⁷

Having utilised the 'play within a play' technique in her award-winning *Our Country's Good*, Wertenbaker took up a comparable meta-theatrical device in her 1995 play, *The Break of Day*. Both projects were commissioned by the director Max Stafford-Clark, who made the encouragement of women playwrights a priority during his regime at the Royal Court. While the 1988 Royal Court premiere of *Our Country's Good* was performed in tandem with the Restoration comedy, *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar,¹⁵⁸ *The Break of Day* was written to be

performed in conjunction with the Out of Joint company's Chekhov production, *Three Sisters*. Following the trajectory of her earlier works, *The Break of Day* is another layered text of cultural references. However, it is not an instantly recognisable reassessment of a classic piece, like *The Love of the Nightingale*. The intertextual clues to Chekhov are more concealed this time, the only immediate connection being a reference to a performance of *Three Sisters* in which one of the characters is going to play Vershinin.

Geraldine Cousin's 1997 essay, 'Revisiting the Prozorovs' documented the parallels between the two Out of Joint productions and an adaptation of Chekhov's play performed by Scarlet Theatre. Cousin established correspondences between several characters in the two plays, most notably between Chekhov's sisters and Nina (singer/songwriter), Tess (journalist/editor) and April (lecturer) 'united through a sisterhood of friendship, and (at least in the past) a shared commitment to feminism' in Wertenbaker's play.¹⁵⁹ Natasha's counterpart is Marisa, who, like Natasha, becomes a mother during the play, while Anfisa has her equivalent in a woman servant coming from an underprivileged social and ethnic background. Wertenbaker calls this latter character Natasha, suggesting that Chekhov's Natasha was also someone artificially implanted among the Prozorovs.¹⁶⁰ Finally, Robert, Tess's actor husband, performs the role of Vershinin and hence is part of both plays and worlds at once.

Both plays are set in a *fin-de-siècle* environment, a century apart, Chekhov portraying the turn of the nineteenth towards the twentieth century and Wertenbaker the end of the millennium. Both dedicate significant space to the interpretation of the past and both Chekhov's sisters and Wertenbaker's protagonists are profoundly disillusioned by the present. While, according to Wertenbaker, Chekhov thought that

women's paid work would solve things in the long run, she decided to investigate what happened when 'women had the opportunity to work but suddenly had allowed themselves not to have children'.¹⁶¹ Besides the Chekhovian parallels, however, she aimed to write an 'absolutely contemporary play' that was 'very immediate'. In Wertenbaker's opinion writing about the past allows more opportunities for the poetic and the imaginative, but she believed that the present 'need[ed] to be addressed' as well. She claimed not to have had a predetermined conclusion in mind, her aim being to explore a range of issues in the process of writing:

The fatigue at the end of the century, the breakdown of a lot of ideals, particularly for women, and this notion of the future and what the future is, what sort of future we are providing for others.¹⁶²

The Break of Day was poorly received by most critics and did not enjoy a notable box office success. Even the author's ambition 'to deal with something important' backfired as a *Daily Mail* critic retorted 'Big issues do not important dramas make'.¹⁶³ Despite her usual equanimity in response to negative critical opinion, Wertenbaker insisted that on this occasion she was 'extremely upset and quite shocked by [the critics'] unwillingness to look at the play'.¹⁶⁴ She felt that some of the critics 'had been in their posts for too long', got 'a bit tired', and did not try to understand *The Break of Day*. She identified its open-ended nature and profusion of ideas as a reason behind its reception, claiming nevertheless that this was part of her point: 'We are assailed by information, often contradictory and that chaos is part of the modern landscape'.¹⁶⁵

In fact, the way *The Break of Day* engages with the protagonists' past and the present establishes it as a post-feminist play that explicitly surveys the developments in women's lives from the seventies to the mid-nineties. In this manner, it illustrates the trajectory of this thesis itself, moving from plays produced during the zenith of the Women's Liberation Movement to works emerging in its aftermath, in times that

re-evaluate the contribution of the different feminist standpoints. The play opens with a scene that invokes the past straightaway: the three protagonists speak nostalgically about their youth, which coincided with the heyday of second-wave feminism. Formerly successful in their careers, by the end of the eighties Tess and Nina have lost faith in the possibility of improvement and have become overwhelmed by a sense of paralysis. April is the only one left believing in her vocation as a source of hope in the future: 'At least one of my nameless students will come into contact with an ancient, wise and passionate mind and ignite'.¹⁶⁶ Tess and Nina, however, cannot find resources for optimism within themselves. Having campaigned in the seventies for women's rights to a career and the possibility of bypassing or delaying parenting, they suddenly find themselves in the position where they would be emotionally prepared to have a child but experience biological difficulties.

From the revelation of Tess's and Nina's aspirations towards mothering the play establishes as its focus the desire to become a parent, and, subsequently, how this ambition reconfigures the individual's future.¹⁶⁷ It is this obsession with parenting and the way it dislocates the protagonists' previous concerns that has hindered critics from relating to *The Break of Day*. Tess and Nina talk with extreme emotional involvement about their desire to mother, lament their infertility and address their lack of empowerment in opposition to their earlier feminist commitment: consequently, the play was widely seen as a backlash manifesto against feminism, advocating a return to female essentialism. For instance Paul Taylor saw the play as a dramatisation of 'how the maternal drive can cause women to betray Orthodox feminism'.¹⁶⁸ Although such a reading is legitimised by Wertenbaker's text, it is not the only critical approach available. In fact, the very opposite is equally

valid; whereby it is precisely the discussion of infertility that connotes a feminist dimension.

Elaine Aston, for example, rightly argues that the play 'indexes a need to reconceive the politics of motherhood in an international arena' and indicates some of the ways in which 'the biological contours of women's lives are globally mapped with the specificities of social, material and cultural geographies'.¹⁶⁹ In other words, instead of betraying the values of second-wave feminism, Wertenbaker invites both her characters and audience to a meditation on a range of topical late twentieth century issues that centres on mothering and the state of the family as an institution, but also include nationalism and cross-border migration. In fact, as suggested by the Chekhov parallels, Wertenbaker placed her debate within the context of what she termed 'the fatigue at the end of the century', a fatigue that correlates 'the breakdown of a lot of ideals, particularly for women'.¹⁷⁰

Although Wertenbaker primarily associates mothering with Tess and Nina, it is another character - Marisa - who introduces the principle of motherhood. Marisa echoes Chekhov's Natasha in her youth and stubbornness, but also in not belonging to the intellectual and middle-class milieu represented by the main characters.¹⁷¹ Though she is more likeable than Natasha she stirs Tess's and Nina's envy through her unproblematic ability to become a mother. The two women also question her capacity to care properly (that is, financially) for the child and advise her to abort the baby and start a career first. The only woman who places herself on Marisa's side is April, who is prepared to admit that their feminist circle of friends made a mistake by postponing motherhood so long for the sake of professional fulfilment. Unlike Chekhov's play, where, as Cousin argues, motherhood is associated with a certain sense of banality via the annoying Natasha (for whom having children is the only

area of expertise), Wertenbaker depicts it as something utterly desirable and connects it with a positive attitude towards the future. Thus, craving for a baby replaces the longing for Moscow of the three sisters.¹⁷²

Despite the optimism associated with the desire for children, Wertenbaker links the two acts - and their parallel plots that follow the two couples' quest for a baby - through the theme of barrenness. Tess needs to appeal to medical assistance in order to conceive, while Nina cannot get pregnant because of a past back-street abortion. Via these two cases, the play also discusses the spiritual barrenness of Britain in the mid-nineties; the physiological barrenness of the characters being metaphors for the decadence and spiritual backlash of society. Nothing had been definitively solved at the end of the twentieth century; 'no ideology, no thought ha[d] worked', according to Wertenbaker, everything being 'bleak [and] extremely uncertain'. The play, however, tries to reflect 'hope - because humanity is always hopeful - but also a certain kind of melancholy, fear and uncertainty about the future'.¹⁷³ Wertenbaker also suggests that the fatigue that characterised the England of the 1990s can only be redeemed by moving beyond the confinements of nationalism and isolationism. Talking about an 'unfulfilled and aimless society', John Peter contended that this kind of barrenness can neither be solved by adoption nor by medical intervention: 'Such a society will have successors but no descendants'.¹⁷⁴ It is not accidental in such a context that those who are able to conceive without assistance are the young and, hence unadulterated, like Marisa; or people in the East, less affected as yet by Western capitalism. Nina and Hugh travel East in order to find their baby. Unlike the regiment in *Three Sisters* the couple do not intend to occupy a territory but to undertake a symbolic gesture of 'a new type of

benevolent colonialism'.¹⁷⁵ Thus, they replicate the sisters' longing and sublimation of hope, pursuing their own quest for a version of Moscow.

Nina and Hugh *want* a baby and, as it happens, they can afford to get hold of one.¹⁷⁶ The irony - if not cynicism - of the situation, however, arises from the radically divergent commitments each party invests in this adoption case. For Nina and Tess it is a personal act of wish-fulfilment, whereas for Mihail, the archetypal Eastern European character in the play, it is a political gesture representing perhaps *the* only contemporary window of opportunity for a better life. Several critics have pointed out in relation to Mihail that he appears more of a 'selfless rather than selfish' character, as he is genuinely interested in helping childless couples instead of wanting to profit financially from child-trade.¹⁷⁷ In one of the most moving speeches of the play Mihail contends that the future 'will be in the hands of the children, possibly most of all these cross-border children [he] helped to get out', who will manage to avoid 'narrow ethnic identification' and 'will be wilfully international'. As a corollary of this optimistic belief, Mihail wishes to 'place the responsibility of history' onto these children's shoulders, in order for them to find a way into the next century and millennium.¹⁷⁸ Thus, hope for the future becomes synonymous with a desire for the 'other': a somewhat naive and illusionary urge to move to the West for (some of) those in the East, and a symbolic re-enactment of a colonial past for those in the West.

As Aston put it, the cross-border child acts as an allegory for a new concept of the family, 'based not on nation but on "community"'.¹⁷⁹ Wertenbaker evokes both a nostalgia of sorts for communism and a reconfiguration of second-wave feminism as a background to the intersection between East and West. All the characters engineering this bond are marked by disillusionment rather than

enthusiasm, and both parties find themselves in a phase that is generally labelled by 'post': post-communism and post-feminism. Wertenbaker talks about the emergence of a 'post-political age' in the aftermath of post-colonialism, where one experiences 'the shift of cultures and the shift of people through several cultures in their lifetime'.¹⁸⁰ Mihail re-interprets his communist allegiance following the change of political regime in his country, while Nina and Tess renegotiate their relationship with feminism in order to suit their current non-militant stance.

Wertenbaker insists on the collaboration between Nina and Hugh from the West and Mihail and his wife from the East; especially in the dynamic montage of Act Two where she details the bureaucratic difficulties they encounter in the adoption process. Wertenbaker makes it obvious that Nina and Hugh could not manage without the insider knowledge of Mihail, while it is equally clear that parentless children would have less of a chance for a decent life in the conditions available in the East. Act Two also constantly switches between the emotional and sentimentalising tone in the adoption strand and the matter-of-fact rendering of Tess's highly mechanical infertility treatment in a London hospital, a switch that ultimately generates suspense and engagement. The parallel strands between these two types of satire are displayed in sharp contrast with Act One, set in the garden of Tess's and Robert's English country house and featuring a linear time-flow. While Act One is dominated by an exuberant display of political positions, Act Two is concerned with the desire for concrete intervention and with the inertia derived from the impossibility of acting according to one's will. It appears as if 'the frustrations and tensions of the first act produced a moral explosion';¹⁸¹ consequently, the moods and styles of the two acts are rather distinct.

As it occurs six months later, the concluding act brings in a clarifying temporal detachment and achieves a final balance. It features again the couples in discussion, but while Nina and Hugh have managed to bring their baby to Britain, Tess and Robert have split up as a result of Tess's extended infertility treatment. Like Chekhov's sisters who never make it to Moscow, Tess fails to obtain the baby she longs for; yet unlike the sisters, who merely come to terms with facts, Tess considers that she has the right to intervene in the shaping of her own destiny. She even contacts Marisa, whom she previously despised, asking her to act as a surrogate mother, only after being ignored does she take the decision to move on and try to understand what has happened.¹⁸² It is this transferred quest - from an obsessive desire for a child to understanding what is behind events - that reinvents Tess as an agent, as 'knowing becomes something to be actively pursued rather than simply desired'.¹⁸³ Thus, hope ends up associated with preoccupations of the mind and 'the break of day' will constitute the dawning of personal re-assessment and, possibly, of knowledge. In fact, it is this idea of self-awareness - characteristic of the late nineties - that Wertenbaker is really eager to convey. The ending is ambiguous, *chaud-froid* in Wertenbaker's terms,¹⁸⁴ in many ways: it is a moment of failure, a loss of illusions, but also an occasion for a new maturity or even rebirth.

Clare Bayley's 1995 review of the Royal Court production located *The Break of Day* as 'a successor to Caryl Churchill's 1982 *Top Girls*',¹⁸⁵ on the grounds that both plays unite successful women who explore the relationships between career and maternity. As opposed to Churchill's all-female cast, however, Wertenbaker scrutinises inter-gender relationships and conflicts: in the Tess-Robert and April-Jamie partnerships. In the case of the former, divergences emerge in relation to babies and different commitments to family values, for the latter this is as a result of

over-prioritising professional careers. In Bayley's reading, the major paradox in *The Break of Day* was located in the fact that the same women who participated in changing history in their youth suddenly found themselves caught unawares by time. In fact, to quote Wertenbaker, 'They are [also] caught unawares by their own longing'.¹⁸⁶ Their battle for more choices for women did come true for the next generation (like Marisa, who ironically does not want to take advantage of them), but this very involvement led to the closing down of certain other choices.

All three friends are caught up in this process but it is Tess who comes out most affected, losing not only her job and husband during the infertility treatment but also ending up perceiving every other woman as a potential rival in her quest for a baby. While Nina is prepared to accept her biological limits and go for an alternative - adoption - Tess refuses to even consider bringing up someone else's child ('I want my own child').¹⁸⁷ Tess cannot avoid constantly positioning herself in relation to Marisa's natural and unproblematic capacity to mother. She goes as far as to claim that 'She has what I want',¹⁸⁸ eventually denying both the sisterhood and anti-essentialism of her previous feminist commitment. The playwright claimed that she wanted to write a play 'about unhappy women who seek a solution to [their] unhappiness', not about 'amazons who sort it all out by themselves'.¹⁸⁹ In the case of Tess, Wertenbaker was interested in showing 'how somebody very intelligent could be destroyed and turned into a victim' - 'the paradox involved' and 'the addiction'.¹⁹⁰

While exploring the ideological transformations experienced by thirty-something women, Wertenbaker also addressed younger women's attitudes towards women's place and roles in society. She wanted to draw attention to what she called 'one of the dangers of feminism':

The next generation, feeling that the choices are there, chooses to throw these choices away assuming that they are going to stay. If each generation does not keep

fighting, in another twenty years' time one will be back at the fifties, and that is a danger.¹⁹¹

This next generation, represented by Marisa, simply do not feel that they owe their forerunners any particular acknowledgement. They plan their lives according to different patterns, removed from politics and the public sphere that Tess, April and Nina - like Churchill's character, Marlene - have been so keen to gain access to. Marisa's outburst when she is advised by Tess and Nina to abort ('So I can end up like you, married to ambition, bitter and childless')¹⁹² echoes the warning addressed to Marlene by the traditional wife in *Top Girls*: 'You'll end up miserable and lonely!' Marisa's governing principle is to 'give in to life', on the spur of the moment, rather than postponing things and hence 'escaping into the future'. She even claims to hate the concept of 'future'; for her the emblematic word is 'now'. In fact, her reinforcement of heterosexuality, marriage and family, alongside the rejection of feminists as unhappy, man-hating and embittered women, sounds like a staged version of anti-feminist backlash manifestos.¹⁹³ Although Wertenbaker was reluctant to classify Marisa in ideological terms - she primarily considered her 'as an individual'¹⁹⁴ - she also claimed that 'To some extent Marisa [was] a victim of the failure of feminism [as a middle-class and intellectual movement] to work through the classes'. However, Wertenbaker claimed that her attack was not targeted against feminism or post-feminism as such, but rather the 'selfishness of the generation of Tess and Nina'¹⁹⁵.

Instead of recommending one single alternative, therefore, Wertenbaker features several women each of whom advocates a different option. Marisa gives birth to a baby in the natural way, fulfilling what might seem to be her biological destiny; Nina bypasses both biology and medical intervention by using her financial privilege and adopting someone else's unwanted baby; while Tess subjects herself to

the emotional, physical, as well as economic expense-cum-exploitation inherent in infertility treatment. Tess's ordeal is perhaps even more complex as she has to consider a third party as well. Not only is she forced to leave the transmission of genes to the baby entirely to her husband but she also ends up exclusively relating to other women as potential egg-donors, disposable servicing objects. She reduces Robert to a mere sperm-producer too: 'If it weren't for your sperm, I'd leave you'.¹⁹⁶

It is Nina's search for a baby, however, that literally parallels Tess's quest, the two intertwined strands constituting the emotional core of the play. Right after an introductory scene featuring Nina's and Hugh's arrival at a mysterious setting, allegedly in Eastern Europe, there comes a snapshot of the London fertility clinic where Tess is a patient. The brief scene features the ironically named Dr Glad's highly technical yet, in fact, not particularly reassuring speech on the treatment Tess is about to receive. Dr Glad appears as an uncanny reminder of Luckham's Consultant, both in his patronising attitude and the way he associates himself with the divine: 'We've performed another miracle'.¹⁹⁷ Although Tess has opted for the treatment herself, like Sal, she is not given a voice in this scene, suggesting that she does not have access to choice and intervention any longer. Tess's body is given over for scientific experimentation the results of which are as yet unknown, thus recalling Adrienne Rich's statement: 'Throughout history, the woman's body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected'.¹⁹⁸

While Tess is reminded of the ticking of her biological clock, Nina is asked for further patience, in agreement with a sense of Balkanic timelessness. In the quick alteration of scenes, Wertenbaker portrays two totally different perceptions of time. Though both are linear, Nina's time is slowed down, whereas Tess's is accelerated. Also, while Nina's time is dedicated to the pursuit of one and the same baby, Tess

has to cope with repeated attempts at conceiving. Despite the details that Wertenbaker brings in to render the emotional and physical traumas suffered by both women, as well as her criticism of the privileges of white, middle-class women - in a position to buy motherhood at almost any cost - she avoids being judgmental: 'Don't judge me!'¹⁹⁹ Tess urges in Act Three. Wertenbaker is aware of the difficulty of taking a stance about the desire for parenthood and the issue of infertility in a neutral, ideologically non-engaged way. Although she maps out both the backlash argument on women's biological urges and the individualist discourse that privileges reproductive technologies, for Wertenbaker, mothering is not merely 'a biological issue, but an economic, cultural and political one', emphasising that 'any rethinking about female identity must accommodate women's options for motherhood'.²⁰⁰

Focusing on Nina's and Hugh's appeals to higher and higher levels of authority, Wertenbaker presents a climate in total contrast to the more or less transparent procedures of western bureaucracy, clearly locating Eastern Europe as the 'other' of the Western world. She constructs an environment entirely governed by corruption, mutual exchange of favours without the smallest attempt at legality. The causes are rooted in poverty; itself connected to a profound sense of disappointment at several decades of communism. Wertenbaker captures on the one hand, a certain veneration for the mainly unknown practices of western society, while on the other, she situates the Orthodox religion as a spiritual background to the region's political and economic stagnation and ultimate cultural difference in relation to the West. Religion is also presented as the force behind the inertia manifested by most local characters, denied almost any sense of positive agency as their sole appropriation of the active pole is via their attempts at mystifying things and delaying decisions. Despite the fact that most of the above details are accurate and child abandonment

constitutes a reality in some countries in Eastern Europe, Wertenbaker's position is highly selective of the *couleur locale*. It reveals an outsider's perspective, captured primarily by the sensational and the picturesque,²⁰¹ only preoccupied with difference to the detriment of the 'same'. Like Eva's various official appeals, Wertenbaker's portrayal of this unspecified place in Eastern Europe is equally melodramatic, not only indicating but also amplifying the existing differences between the two worlds her characters are moving between.

The only exception to this character-type attributed to the region is embodied by Mihail, the adoption-fixer. However, he is someone communicating with both worlds. According to Wertenbaker, this character was modelled on a former diplomat - someone literally and symbolically liaising between two worlds - who started fighting communism from within the party. Wertenbaker claimed that through this character she wanted to focus on someone who 'was not denying it all, but rather questioning and worrying about the loss of values associated to communism.'²⁰² Mihail also acts as a kind of authorial voice. Apart from the existential views displayed in Act One and Tess's final note of engagement, he makes key statements on ideological positioning. Talking about the children sent over to Western adoptive parents, he expresses his belief in a better future for them there. In another intervention, however, he voices a geographically and politically less engaged creed. He claims that neither communism nor capitalism can be associated with the ultimate truth, as in fact 'Truth is not fixed, it is not a Platonic ideogram, it moves with history'.²⁰³ This remark, bearing the influence of Wertenbaker's post-modern thinking, relativises the previous stances. It also connects to Wertenbaker's conviction that 'It is wrong to get stuck in only one culture and to identify yourself completely with it'.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, Wertenbaker equally stresses the

paradoxical and schizophrenic component of Mihail's personal location. Being involved in the colonising process of child-adoptions - arguing for the viability of one system of truth above the other - his illusion of neutrality is basically a form of mere wish-fulfilment.

The final act, measuring the success of the parallel quests, shows both couples revisiting their initial motives and lifestyles. Nina and Hugh hardly have time for their baby, a fact prefigured by Nina's earlier reference to the myth of Demeter and Persephone. She points out that we have neither the daughter's version of the myth nor a clear idea of how the baby might feel about being an object of maternal desire. Wertenbaker has equally declined detailed scrutiny of the future outcome of cross-continental adoptions: 'It is for somebody else to write the child's version'. However, she also added:

When these children are twenty-five or thirty there will probably be a playwright and you'll get a story. [...] I think it will probably be a very different story of belonging to two cultures, I don't know, although most of them tend to identify totally with their adopted countries and not with their origins.²⁰⁵

Unlike Nina, who has seemingly achieved her quest yet somewhat lost interest in its outcome, Tess continues to lay claim to agency with the same intensity as before. Watching Robert play Vershinin, she understands the importance of this role for him; however, coming to terms with life in silent resignation - as arguably the three sisters did - is impossible for her to accept. For Tess, living in the late twentieth century signifies not yielding to defeat. Her still obsessive creed is to try and understand what has happened, an urge that - in Robert's words - 'could even [be] hopeful'.²⁰⁶

Writing in and about a time generally labelled as post-modern, Wertenbaker voices attitudes ascribed to a new stage in feminism. Her claim to see feminism 'as humanism, and the questioning of authority', and as an ideology from which men have at least as much to 'get as women do',²⁰⁷ removes her from potential

accusations of essentialism and allows for universal scrutiny. Addressing the climate of the end of the twentieth century, Wertenbaker equally acknowledges the difficulty of sustaining one's belief in grand narratives and convincing ideologies: 'The whole despair at the end of this century is discovering that there are few solutions to society and to the abuse of power'.²⁰⁸ Though originally she places all three protagonists in heterosexual partnerships, Wertenbaker shows two of these splitting up during the play. April and Jamie are unable to make a serious commitment to each other as their loyalties are invested in their careers, while Tess and Robert go their separate ways because they both decide to follow their personal ambitions. Triggered by various facts, singlehood in *The Break of Day* acts as a reflection of the trend for atomisation in nineties society. Deciding to try for a baby without the support of a partner, Tess is prepared to join the increasing community of independent women, but also to assume the potential financial difficulties of single parenting. Both Tess's intended approach to mothering via IVF and Nina's and Hugh's adoption constitute forms of surrogate parenting, involving such post-modern concepts as substitution and fluidity of boundaries.

At the end of the day, it is flexibility and the irrelevance of boundaries of any kind that Wertenbaker is arguing for, not just when talking about politics and geography, but above all when addressing women's options at the end of the second millennium. She allows women to stick to traditional families and participate in the backlash against feminism, but also to pursue their rights to understand motives behind events, in a post-feminist attempt at accepting diversity and critical detachment. Neither does she deny her characters - whether single or married - the option of having a career of their own, nor the chance of embarking on parenting at whatever age, cost or pain. The endnote of optimism reasserts Wertenbaker's belief

in humanism as a way out of the crisis. Paralleling the playwright's creed in the redemptive nature of art, the characters in *The Break of Day* are invited to re-enact Robert's identification with Vershinin and to redeem their own lives through moral, emotional and intellectual involvement.

5.5 Conclusions

Although none of the playwrights discussed in this chapter chose to categorise themselves within a particular type of ideological positioning, they and the agenda of post-feminism share similar concerns. They replicate the theoretical diversity of post-feminism via their stylistic divergence and the multiplicity of their artistic aspirations. They also revisit, however, some of the worries formulated by backlash feminism: such as the failure of feminism to transgress the boundaries of social class, the claim that feminism is a language of victimisation, and also feminism's inadequacy in dealing with the issues of the family and maternity. The playwrights investigate the desire for parenting in a multitude of circumstances: from a momentary teenage longing for adulthood and cognition to a long-term yearning to act as a carer on the part of thirty-something professional women. They tackle this desire from the standpoint of single as well as married women, and as something both shared and rejected by their partners - treating them all as equally legitimate. In all these cases, however, desire is juxtaposed to the lack of fulfilment; and Cooke, Luckham and Wertenbaker examine the potential causes - ranging from the political to the biological - behind not being able to give birth or experience parenting.

By investigating some of the ways in which choices with regard to maternity are negotiated, the three playwrights not only highlight the emotional and political

importance of this matter but also invite readers and audiences to get involved and follow up on the issues raised in the plays. This is not intended in a didactic or activist fashion though, but rather on a personal note that may or may not connect to mutual experiences. In all cases the premise is a strong longing: however, the particular circumstances in which these longings are located are different in each case. For the protagonists past their peak with regard to the ability to conceive, the causes are very clearly physiological - straightforward barrenness for Wertenbaker's Tess and Nina and increased foetal risk for Luckham's Sal. However, while Wertenbaker focuses on the options available for her protagonists with regard to conception (IVF for Tess and adoption for Nina), Luckham concentrates on the baby's chances of survival in a medical climate hostile to imperfection. For Cooke's teenage Dynette, there are no physiological impediments; she is facing family resistance, the end of her studies and failure to achieve the career she is also aspiring to.

Although all three playwrights centre very strongly on their respective protagonists - thus creating rewarding character roles - they also provide in each instance a neutral voice to comment on the events. Cooke literally includes a chorus (formed, in succession, of the rest of the characters) to challenge Dynette at key stages of her rite of passage. Luckham features the Writer as an orchestrator of events, who despite not interacting with any of the characters provides an omniscient commentary. Wertenbaker's choric figure is Mihail, the character liaising with both the West and the East, as he takes a post-modern stance on history. He centres on the future of adopted, cross-border children, the ultimate signifiers for the new concept of family and the kind of fluid boundaries - based on community rather than nation - that Wertenbaker advocates.

Cooke, Luckham and Wertenbaker also investigate agency (embodied in the desire for parenting) and the ways this agency is handed over to others - whether members of the medical profession (in the cases of Sal and Tess) or the family (for Dynette). All three playwrights argue that once this transfer has been engineered, the protagonists cease to exist as independent subjects with a will of their own; they are instantly transformed into objects - for scientific research, subordinated to medical surveillance (Tess and Sal), and the prisoners of family morality (Dynette). Thus the authors scrutinise the limits and boundaries of objectification, as well as the extent to which one can delegate or reclaim agency. Both Tess and Sal can be regarded as victims of medical intervention, yet they emerge from their respective traumas with an even stronger desire to understand facts and to take control of their destinies. Tess, Sal and Jackie do not finally find themselves reduced to the status of mere spectators. They conclude the plays as women, not just as characters: empowered by their frustrations and eager to intervene yet again to make a different sense of the world.

¹ The following selection of representative works illustrates the different phases and stances within the debate. Some formulate a direct backlash argument, such as the work of Camille Paglia - seen as the most confrontational figure of backlash feminism - especially *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Christina Hoff Sommers's *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1994) or Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* (New York: Warner Books, 1986). Others, such as Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1991) and Ann Oakley's and Juliet Mitchell's, eds., *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing through the Backlash* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), offer overviews of the 'backlash' phenomenon, placing it in a cultural and political context. A third strand investigates the impact of 'post-feminism' and includes works such as Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age* (New York, London: Routledge, 1991); Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon and Ingrid Richter, *The Illusions of 'Post-Feminism': New Women, Old Myths* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995); Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: from the Second Wave to 'Post-feminism'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995); Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Forms* (London: Routledge, 1997); Natasha Walter, *The New Feminism* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998) and *On the Move: Feminism for a New Generation* (London: Virago, 1999); Liz Sperling and Mairead Owen, eds., *Women and Work: the Age of Post-feminism?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

² Ann Oakley, 'A Brief History of Gender', in *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing through the Backlash*, ed. by Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 33-34.

³ Cf. Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York: Summit Books, 1981) and Germaine Greer, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984). Also see

Christopher Lasch's *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York and London: Norton, 1995).

⁴ Judith Stacey, 'Are Feminist Afraid to Leave Home? The Challenge of Conservative Pro-Family Feminism', in *What Is Feminism?*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

⁵ Cf. Christina. Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York, London: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

⁶ Cf. Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago, 1987a); Rosalind Coward, *Our Treacherous Hearts: Why Women Let Men Get Their Way?* (London: Faber, 1993) and *Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium ?* (London: Harper & Collins, 1999).

⁷ Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and how It Will Change the 21st Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).

⁸ Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994).

⁹ Cf. Paglia's notorious claim: 'If civilization had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts'. In Paglia, *Sex, Art and American Culture* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. ix.

¹⁰ Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Forms* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 1.

¹¹ Anna Yeatman, *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 49.

¹² Jane Millar and Caroline Glendinning, "'It All Really Starts in the Family": Gender Divisions and Poverty', in *Women and Poverty in Britain: The 1990s*, ed. by Glendinning and Millar (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 3. Comparatively, this source also indicates that ten years ago this figure had been 5 million.

¹³ Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Viking, 1997), p. 552.

¹⁴ J. Carvel, 'Schools Urged to Focus on Low Achieving Boys', *The Guardian* (11 July 1996), quoted by Liz Sperling, 'Women and Work in the Age of Post-feminism', in *Women and Work: The Age of Post-feminism?*, ed. by Liz Sperling and Mairead Owen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 1.

¹⁵ Horlick's professional success was generally accompanied by references to her also managing to be mother to five children, with implicit challenges to her ability at coping at both levels - an issue never raised in connection to her husband, who was equally successful in professional terms.

¹⁶ Between 1918 and 1997 there were only 8 Cabinet Ministers, in total. Cf. Jane Pilcher, *Women in Contemporary Britain: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999) p. 151.

¹⁷ Sperling, p. 12. Full-time paid work continues to be primarily associated with men, while part-time work with women. In 1997, of all those working full time, 67% were men and 33% were women; and of all those working part time, 81% were women and only 19% were men. Cf. Pilcher, p. 35.

¹⁸ In spite of the Equal Pay Act (1970, amended in 1984) women working full time earn 72% of men's average full-time weekly earnings. (Pilcher, p. 38.) According to the Equal Opportunities Commission the difference in earnings was 20% in 2000, which is why have set up a taskforce to negotiate the gender-based pay gap. Cf. Tracy McVeigh, 'Taskforce Calls for how to Close the Gender Pay Divide', *The Observer* (25 February 2001). On the other hand, there is an increasing body of research on the emerging gap in earnings between highly qualified professional women and their unskilled counterparts. Cf. the work of Anne Phizacklea and Carol Wolkowitz, *Homeworking Women: Gender, Racism and Class at Work* (London: Sage, 1995).

¹⁹ [W]omen's 'preferences' will be shaped by their available options, and it has often been pointed out that, as Britain has the lowest level of state (national or local) provision of childcare in Europe, then it is very likely that women with caring responsibilities will have a 'preference' for part-time work. Cf. Rosemary Crompton, *Women and Work in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 35.

²⁰ Anja Hohmeyer, 'The National Abortion Campaign', in *Feminist Activism in the 1990s*, ed. by Gabriele Griffin (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995), p. 44. Under current regulations, 'legally induced abortions' can only be performed after two medical practitioners certified the existence of 'necessary grounds', which include the risk to the mental or physical state of the woman or/and the risk that the child, if born, would suffer from serious handicap. Since these grounds are open to interpretation, there is a variation in terms of access to abortions depending on the region and on individual doctors' judgements. One in three women pays for her abortion privately because access to National Health Service abortions is restricted by local health authorities. Cf. Pilcher, p. 95.

²¹ A US poll showed that 55 per cent of teenage girls would consider becoming a single parent and favour divorces. (Rowbotham, p. 561.) While in 1971 there were 7 lone mothers for each lone father,

in 1994 there were 14. Cf. John Haskey, 'Population Review: Families and Households in Great Britain', *Population Trends*, no. 85. (1996), pp. 7-24., quoted in Pilcher, p. 86.

²² Debjani Chatterjee, 'Harnessing Shakti: The Work of the Bengali Women's Support Group', in Griffin, 1995, p. 95.

²³ Elaine Aston, ed., *Feminist Theatre Voices* (Loughborough: Loughborough Theatre Texts, 1997a), p. 27.

²⁴ Mary Remnant, introduction to *Plays by Women*, Volume 8. (London: Methuen, 1990), p. vii.

²⁵ Susan Croft considered the play 'the most subtle exploration of this theme', in 'Black Women Playwrights in Britain', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), pp. 91-92.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Winsome Pinnock, 'Leave Taking', in *First Run: New Plays by New Writers*, ed. by Kate Harwood (London: Nick Hern, 1989).

²⁸ Besides her own particular case, Pinnock refers to playwrights such as Jacqueline Rudet, Bernadine Evaristo, Trish Cooke, Michael Ellis and Michael McMillan.

²⁹ Winsome Pinnock, 'Breaking Down the Door', in *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, ed. by Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers, (Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1999), p. 31.

³⁰ Pinnock, in Gottlieb and Chambers, p. 36.

³¹ Trish Cooke, interviewed by Jozefina Komporály (17 October 2000).

³² Winsome Pinnock, interviewed by Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, in *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), p. 46.

³³ In October 2000 Cooke had just got in touch with an agent, looking into the possibility of a return to acting.

³⁴ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ While the play was running at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Cooke received a couple of letters from a Christian group who had found it very offensive and blasphemous. Also see Peter Kemp's review article - 'Call of Nature', *The Independent* (8 September 1989) - that presents the play as a 'rudimentary little scenario about the perils of getting pregnant before sitting your O levels', with 'scenes as flat and simplistic as diagrams'.

³⁷ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.

³⁸ Tim Brown, 'Back Street Mammy' - Review, *The Guardian* (9 October 1989).

³⁹ Robin Thornber, 'Back Street Mammy' - Review, *The Guardian* (17 January 1991).

⁴⁰ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.

⁴¹ Cf. for instance, Pam Gems's or Timberlake Wertenbaker's focus on outstanding characters derived from history or myth, such as Queen Christina, Edith Piaf, Camille Claudel, Marlene Dietrich or Isabelle Eberhardt, Pope Joan, Philomel and Procne etc.

⁴² This disruption of linear time characterises Cooke's later work as well and constitutes a device that has preoccupied her - without, however, establishing connections with other playwrights' or theorists' use of similar techniques.

⁴³ Jeffrey Wainwright, 'Back Street Mammy - West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds' - Review, *The Independent* (24 January 1991).

⁴⁴ Trish Cooke, 'Back Street Mammy', in *First Run*, volume 2., ed. by Kate Harwood (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), p. 87. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

⁴⁵ Betty Caplan, 'Back Street Mammy' - Review, *The Guardian* (11 September 1989).

⁴⁶ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.

⁴⁷ Cooke, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁰ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.

⁵¹ Cooke, p. 66.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 79-80. The idea of first generation West Indian immigrant parents wanting their children to succeed at all costs in Britain is also dramatised by Winsome Pinnock in *Leave Taking*. Pinnock's heroine, Viv, equally sabotages her parents' ideals and her own subsequent success by deciding not to take her exams. In Pinnock's words, 'For her there needs to be another journey, which is the journey back, to make her aware, to find herself and then to succeed on her terms. Not to feel that she has lost herself, or denied who she is, in order to fit in, or fit her mother's idea of success'. Cf. Pinnock, interviewed by Stephenson and Langridge, p. 49.

- ⁵³ Cooke, p. 72.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 77.
- ⁵⁵ Wainwright, 1991.
- ⁵⁶ Croft, p. 92.
- ⁵⁷ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Cooke, p. 44.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 51.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 69.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 69.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 87.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 91.
- ⁶⁸ Kate Harwood, Introduction to *Back Street Mammy*, in *First Run*, volume 2., ed. by Kate Harwood (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), p. xiv.
- ⁶⁹ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.
- ⁷⁰ Cooke, p. 88.
- ⁷¹ Cooke, quoted in Betty Caplan, 1989.
- ⁷² Cooke interviewed by Komporály.
- ⁷³ Cooke, p. 95.
- ⁷⁴ Cooke interviewed by Komporály.
- ⁷⁵ Cooke, p. 95.
- ⁷⁶ Cf. Luckham, 'Trafford Tanzi', in *Plays by Women*, vol.2., ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen, 1983).
- ⁷⁷ Janelle Reinelt, 'Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama', in *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, ed. by Helen Keyssar (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 41.
- ⁷⁸ Margaret Llewellyn-Jones established a connection between a range of plays that celebrate female energy, 'thus reclaiming the female body from the stereotype, challenging male practices'. She pointed out the shared Brechtian and Artaudian overtones of such works, as Jane Arden's *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven* (1969), Maureen Duffy's *Rites* (1969) and *Trafford Tanzi*. Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, 'Claiming a Space', in Griffiths and Llewellyn-Jones, p. 29.
- ⁷⁹ In a sense therefore, the play compares with Cooke's later attempts at replicating and reaching out to a Northern working-class environment.
- ⁸⁰ Michelene Wandor, *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 178.
- ⁸¹ Winner of the TMA Best Regional Play award for 1992. The play was first performed on 11 March 1992 at the Salisbury Playhouse and revived by the Theatr Clwyd company at the Emlyn Williams Theatre, Mold, on 8 October 1993 - both productions being directed by Annie Castledine.
- ⁸² Claire Luckham, in conversation with Alison Pearson; in Pearson, 'Woman on the Verge of a Nervous Breakthrough: From Female Wrestlers to Victorian Actresses; Clare Luckham's Plays Empower the "Weaker Sex"', *Independent on Sunday* (18 November 1990).
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Cf. for instance, Gillian Plowman's *Me and My Friend*, Tom Griffin's *The Boys Next Door*, Peter Nichols's *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, Mark Medoff's *Children of a Lesser God*.
- ⁸⁵ Luckham, in Sarah Hemming, 'Relative Values: Claire Luckham's New Play is about Down Syndrome', *The Independent* (11 March 1992a).
- ⁸⁶ Luckham, explanatory note to 'The Choice', in *Plays by Women*, vol. 10., ed. by Annie Castledine (London: Methuen, 1994), pp. 113-4. All further quotations are taken from this edition.
- ⁸⁷ Luckham, in Hemming, 1992a.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Luckham, afterword to *The Choice*, p. 114.
- ⁹² Luckham, p. 72. Also cf. p. 93: THE WRITER: 'Was I the princess and he the frog?'
- ⁹³ Ibid., p. 94.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 76.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁷ CONSULTANT: 'You get used to it, y'know, being God!' (p. 69.) While in Cooke's play it was the (aborted) baby - and by extension, unmediated, natural fertility - that was associated with a god-like image, Luckham focuses on the idea of human intervention and locates the medical specialist into the role of the creator.

⁹⁸ Luckham, p. 69.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 74 and 97.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987). Cf. especially Chapter 2.4 'Medical Metaphors of Women's Bodies: Birth', pp. 54-67. (56-57), but also Chapter 3.8 'Birth, Resistance, Race and Class', pp.139-155. Martin's interdisciplinary (anthropology meets social history) study - based on an extended number of interviews conducted with a representative sample of women across the US - focuses on the female body in relation to science and medical intervention. She analyses issues of cultural representation, while confronting the way women in different socio-economic positions perceive themselves and their particular society via the medium of events exclusively experienced by women (menstruation, childbirth, menopause).

¹⁰² Jo Murphy-Lawless, *Reading Birth and Death: A History of Obstetric Thinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 18 and 198.

¹⁰³ Martin, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁰⁵ Murphy-Lawless, p. 200.

¹⁰⁶ Ann Oakley and Heather Graham, 'Competing Ideologies of Reproduction: Medical and Maternal Perspectives on Pregnancy', in *Women, Health and Reproduction*, ed. by Helen Roberts, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 53.

¹⁰⁷ RAY: 'My mission has succeeded, my seed will live on', Luckham, p. 71.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

¹¹¹ Ibid. pp. 75-76.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 77.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 78.

¹¹⁴ Term devised by childbirth educators and midwives, such as Sheila Kitzinger and Caroline Flint, in order to raise awareness about the rapid increase in the medicalisation of giving birth. They specifically aimed at highlighting the likelihood of inductions triggering subsequent waves of further interventions. Cf. Murphy-Lawless, p. 204.

¹¹⁵ Cf. the obsession manifested by the media and show business in particular with regard to the supremacy of the body beautiful. Although sperm donation - as a remedy for infertility - has been available for a long time, nowadays possibilities such as the selling and purchasing of eggs and sperm belonging to supermodels has become a reality. Negotiated mainly in the particularly fashion and beauty conscious Los Angeles area and over the internet, this increasingly successful business branch claims to offer the opportunity to 'correct' physical malformations and stop the transmission of undesired genes. Also see the frequent television coverage of the topic, including 'Ruby's American Pie' (BBC1 - Sunday, 18 June 2000).

¹¹⁶ Luckham, pp. 88-89.

¹¹⁷ Sheila Kitzinger, 'Why Women Need Midwives', in *The Midwife Challenge*, ed. by Sheila Kitzinger (London: Pandora Press, 1988), p. 15.

¹¹⁸ Louise McMahon, representative of the Home Birth Centre, *Home Birth Newsletter* (1991-92), quoted in Murphy-Lawless, p. 236.

¹¹⁹ Rosalind Petchesky, 'Foetal Images: the Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction', in Michelle Stanworth, ed., *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

¹²⁰ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 113-119.

¹²¹ E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 209.

¹²² Luckham, pp. 81-82.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 83. - italics mine.

¹²⁴ Gerry V. Stimson and Barbara Webb, *Going to See the Doctor* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

¹²⁵ Luckham, p. 86.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 96. I came across a version of this attitude, when finding out about serious medical interventions conducted upon young children suffering from Down's Syndrome. The idea behind the aesthetic surgeries aimed at concealing the slant eyes, for instance, was to make these children look more 'normal', so that they would not be facing any sort of future discrimination owing to their physical appearance.

¹²⁷ Luckham, p. 98.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 104. Sal's gesture of exclusion directly replicates Mary's ignorance of Joseph's wishes in Wandor's *AID Thy Neighbour* (Cf. Chapter 3).

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 108.

¹³² Ibid., p. 111.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 112.

¹³⁴ Paul Allen, in Sarah Hemming, 'The End of the Year Show: Sarah Hemming Canvasses Opinion from the World of Theatre on the Best Plays and Musicals of the Year', *The Independent* (23 December 1992b). Allen also added, 'However many rules you have about what makes a good play, the beauty is being able to break them'.

¹³⁵ Luckham, p. 112.

¹³⁶ Luckham, in Hemming, 1992a.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Luckham, p. 93.

¹⁴⁰ Murphy-Lawless, p. 264.

¹⁴¹ Phrase used by John Peter, in 'Pregnant with Hope' - Review of *The Break of Day*, *Sunday Times* (3 December 1995), pp. 14-15.

¹⁴² 'Women Revealed', interview with Timberlake Wertenbaker, broadcast on Woman's Hour, BBC Radio 4 (20 June 1991).

¹⁴³ Timberlake Wertenbaker, interviewed by Jozefina Komporály (21 June 1999).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Patti P. Gillespie, 'Feminist Theatre: a Rhetorical Phenomenon', in *Women in American Theatre*, ed. by Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2nd edition, 1987), p. 279.

¹⁴⁶ Wertenbaker, in David Edgar, *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Faber, 1999), p. 75.

¹⁴⁷ Wertenbaker interviewed, in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), p. 137.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁵⁰ Winsome Pinnock, in Gottlieb and Chambers, p. 33.

¹⁵¹ Wertenbaker, in Edgar, p. 75.

¹⁵² Wertenbaker, interviewed by John L. DiGaetani, in *A Search for a Postmodern Theater* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 267.

¹⁵³ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Komporály

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Trevor R. Griffiths, 'Waving not Drowning', in Griffiths and Llewellyn-Jones, p. 73.

¹⁵⁷ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Stephenson and Langridge, p. 138.

¹⁵⁸ This is the play Wertenbaker's convict characters are rehearsing throughout *Our Country's Good*.

¹⁵⁹ Geraldine Cousin, 'Revisiting the Prozorovs', *Modern Drama*, no. 40. (1997), p. 325.

¹⁶⁰ Unlike Chekhov, however, Wertenbaker gives practically no voice to her homonymous character. Natasha connotes a world totally removed from that of Nina and Tess, a world of profound political turmoil where sheer survival has become a major issue. In contrast, the protagonists of the play are so preoccupied with the details of their private lives that they cannot spare a moment for taking Natasha's situation into account. For them, the personal has continued to remain the political only in the sense that it is now the self that constitutes the sole principle governing their lives. In other words,

it is their refusal to listen that primarily silences Natasha and reduces her self-expression to the medium of body language.

¹⁶¹ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Komporály.

¹⁶² Wertenbaker, interviewed by Stephenson and Langridge, p. 144.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Wertenbaker, unpublished interview, 1997, quoted in Susan Carlson, 'Language and Identity in Wertenbaker's Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, ed. by Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 146.

¹⁶⁶ Wertenbaker, *The Break of Day* (Faber, 1995), pp. 18-19. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

¹⁶⁷ This preoccupation with parenting constituted the thematic link towards a mini-season of two plays produced in the autumn of 1995 at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester. Attempting to explore the dramatic treatment of motherhood, Wertenbaker's *The Break of Day* was performed in parallel with Ruth Carter's *A Yearning*. (*The Break of Day*, Leicester Haymarket, first performance 26 October 1995; *A Yearning*, Haymarket Studio, first performance 31 October 1995.) Beyond their shared interest in the exploration of the politics of motherhood both plays also displayed solid intertextual links with influential works in the canon of world literature, the Wertenbaker-Chekhov associations being doubled by Carter's loose rewriting of Lorca's *Yerma*.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Taylor, *The Independent* (30 November 1995), p. 13.

¹⁶⁹ Elaine Aston, 'Geographies of Oppression - The Cross-Border Politics of (M)othering: *The Break of Day* and *A Yearning*', *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 24. No. 3. (Autumn 1999a), p. 247.

¹⁷⁰ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Stephenson and Langridge, p. 144.

¹⁷¹ Wertenbaker treats the character of Natasha with considerable sympathy. She claimed that 'I just liked her' (Wertenbaker interviewed by Komporály) and established a kind of imaginary parallel between Natasha's status, as a social outsider, and her own, in terms of national identity - a parallel that can be extended to include both the character of Mihail and the adopted children. 'I was brought up with a complicated cultural mix: Basque, French, Anglo-American and always felt slightly outside any one of them. I think I can identify with outsiders imaginatively. What it means to be an outsider has always interested me - that feeling of being estranged from your childhood and roots.' - Unpublished interview with Wertenbaker, 1997, quoted in Carlson, 2000, p. 141.

¹⁷² Cousin, 1997.

¹⁷³ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Komporály.

¹⁷⁴ John Peter, pp. 14-15.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Wertenbaker is probably alluding to the highly publicised case of a British couple that attempted to smuggle a baby from Romania in 1994, as well as to her own personal experience of cross-continental adoption.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Aston, 1999a, p. 248.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Wertenbaker, p. 82.

¹⁷⁹ Aston, 1999a, p. 248. Susan Carlson elaborates on the concept of 'cross-border' children further, claiming that Wertenbaker also asks her audience to 'recognise their lives as "cross-border", and think about themselves as people trying out, performing those aspects of themselves that seem truest to their multiple experiences of the world'. Cf. Carlson, 2000, p. 146.

¹⁸⁰ Wertenbaker, quoted in Carlson, 2000, p. 145.

¹⁸¹ John Peter, p. 14.

¹⁸² Marisa, in fact, never receives Tess's letter, as Nick decides not to show it to her (p. 91.). NICK: 'I wouldn't let her do it'.

¹⁸³ Cousin, 1997, p. 334.

¹⁸⁴ Wertenbaker interviewed by Komporály.

¹⁸⁵ Clare Bayley, 'Wanting it All - and More, Review of *The Break of Day*, by Timberlake Wertenbaker, at the Royal Court Theatre, *New Statesman and Society* (1 December 1995), p. 33.

¹⁸⁶ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Komporály

¹⁸⁷ Wertenbaker, pp. 34-35.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. A similar sort of addiction - though not to technology but to the obsession with the idea of mothering - is dramatised in Ayshe Raif's 1989 play, *Caving In*. Raif also focuses on a protagonist (Maggie) in her late thirties who desperately wants a child, although her husband is imprisoned for the

foreseeable future. Raif's play is not constructed on the suspense regarding the success of an infertility treatment or an AID-scenario, but on Maggie's inner conflict, between her desire for a child and her loyalty to her husband. Ultimately - like Wertenbaker's Tess - she fails to achieve her quest as a result of both emotional and physiological problems. Despite having established a new relationship she cannot liberate herself from being haunted by her husband, a haunting that gradually translates into so-far-repressed revelations of an earlier miscarriage and an infection that prevents her from conceiving. The play closes with a juxtaposition between the husband's prison sentence and Maggie's 'metaphoric 'life sentence', both acting out external forces of predestination. Unlike Tess, Maggie does not have access to resources for contestation at this stage. Instead of searching for causes behind events she simply yields to defeat, thus replicating rather the resignation of Chekhov's three sisters. Cf. Raif, 'Caving In', in *Plays by Women*, vol. 8., ed. by Mary Remnant (London: Methuen, 1990).

¹⁹¹ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Komporály.

¹⁹² Wertenbaker, p. 32.

¹⁹³ Cf. the recent American movement, launched following the publication of Laura Doyle's manifesto-like volume *The Surrendered Wife*, that aims at deconstructing women's independence and celebrates submissiveness to husbands. 'Witness: Surrendered Wives', Channel 4 (1 April 2001).

¹⁹⁴ It is Nick, Marisa's partner and Hugh's son who contends: 'Marisa and I think that if you lead your life properly as an individual, that pervades the world'. (p. 39.)

¹⁹⁵ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Komporály.

¹⁹⁶ Wertenbaker, p. 73.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1991).

¹⁹⁹ Wertenbaker, p. 91.

²⁰⁰ Carlson, 2000, p. 146.

²⁰¹ A comparable kind of outsider's perspective on Eastern Europe is offered by Caryl Churchill's 1990 play, *Mad Forest*. Churchill wrote her stylistically challenging play as a result of a brief visit to Romania in early 1990. Like Wertenbaker, Churchill also focused on parallel lives and captured the dire economic conditions as well as the ongoing inter-ethnic tensions of the period. However, instead of her usual challenge to mainstream stereotypes she ended up replicating received perceptions, such as in the case of the Hungarian minority that she presented as the subversive 'other'. She ultimately located Romania itself as 'other' too: as an exotic terrain in total opposition to Western values. By inserting brief passages in Romanian (replicating the Brechtian captions that introduce each scene) into her English play she set up a binary opposition between the two languages, that underpins, reinforces and amplifies the cultural differences mapped out by the characters and events. Cf. Churchill, *Mad Forest: A Play from Romania* (London: Nick Hern, 1990).

²⁰² Wertenbaker also added: 'I wanted to show a communist who has lost his world and who was not at all convinced that he should have.' (Wertenbaker, interviewed by Komporály).

²⁰³ Wertenbaker, p. 59.

²⁰⁴ DiGaetani, interview with Wertenbaker, p. 267.

²⁰⁵ Wertenbaker interviewed by Komporály.

²⁰⁶ Wertenbaker, p. 94.

²⁰⁷ DiGaetani, p. 270.

²⁰⁸ Wertenbaker, interviewed by Stephenson and Langridge, p. 141

Conclusions

Feminism *is* and *must* be a transformational politics, which addresses every aspect of life. It is not simply a laundry list of so-called women's issues such as childcare and equal pay. While these issues are important, feminism is not a new ghetto where women are confined, to be concerned about only a select list of topics separated from the overall social and economic context of our lives. Similarly, feminism is not just an 'add women and stir' into existing institutions, ideologies, or political parties as they are.¹

This thesis has been concerned with multiplicity and diversity - in terms of both the successive feminist interventions and women's writing for the stage between the mid-fifties and the mid-nineties. The key facet of my argument has been to indicate the co-existence of different approaches in all disciplines that I drew upon, and I endeavoured to bring together representative cases for the various discourses on mothering, from feminist theory to social history, in relation to British women's theatre. It is crucial to stress, however, that the versatile preoccupation with the topic of mothering and parenting continues in plays and productions to this day. In conclusion, I wish to address some of these new directions, alongside a summary of my findings. I juxtapose two sets of play and performance texts: one that emerged through my analysis and which I perceive as an alternative history of the past four decades in the UK, and another that constitutes an alternative pathway to my study. The latter includes works that I did not cover in my thesis but which potentially could have generated comparable analyses of post-war to contemporary British women's theatre.

Women's playwriting in the mid-fifties was marked by an aesthetic diversity that was to characterise the entire period under scrutiny, and constituted a turning point in British theatre. Rejecting biological determinism, dissociating parenting

from the feminine and opening it up for both genders, as well as locating the maternal as sensual and as a source of power, Enid Bagnold, Shelagh Delaney and Ann Jellicoe all identified *avant la lettre* feminist concerns. Informed by bourgeois liberal and socialist feminism, Pam Gems's and Caryl Churchill's seventies and early eighties plays focused on the mutual exclusion between maternity and professional success. But while for Churchill's protagonists this choice was voluntary, Gems's Queen Christina was deprived of agency in this sense. Churchill considered and rejected surrogacy as an option in *Owners* and located it as a temporarily viable yet ultimately unsatisfactory arrangement in *Top Girls*. Thus, Churchill problematised both biological and surrogate mothering while Gems pinpointed the latter's failures, endorsing the supremacy of biological bonds. Scrutinising different commune-type arrangements, Michelene Wandor contrasted two couples with opposing sexual orientations and Charlotte Keatley followed the lives of four women in a matrilineage. But while Wandor's late seventies play aimed at the legitimisation of parental desire, irrespective of sexuality, Keatley's work, written a decade later, focused on the quality of parenting and of human communication. Examining transformations in women's commitment to family, parenting and work throughout the late eighties and early nineties, Trish Cooke, Claire Luckham and Timberlake Wertenbaker centred on career women wishing to start a family, most of them having moved from involvement in second-wave feminism to an indirect support of post-feminist concerns. For all these women, conception or gestation was problematised by age-related physiological difficulties and was connected to a loss of agency. Despite the protagonists' genuine longing for motherhood, however, the playwrights mainly emphasised their failure at achieving this goal, indicating - as compensation - the reclamation of agency as a source of hope, emotional detachment and cognition.

I commenced this analysis with a moment of radical transformation in British theatre and ended it on a note of post-modern and post-feminist distantiation and multiplicity. I wanted to bring my analysis as close to the present as possible, while also being able to observe the plays in a historical and cultural perspective. On the one hand I intended to cover the passage from proto-feminism through second-wave feminism to post-feminism, as documented by the playwrights, and, on the other, I wanted to indicate that some of the plays were permeated by more than one position. I have emphasised, therefore, the idea of intersection and confluence throughout: both between genres - from drawing room comedy to music-hall, experimentalism to working-class realism and docu-drama - and political stances - from bourgeois-egalitarian to liberal, from cultural to radical feminism.

This analysis could, of course, have focused on other significant texts. I have, for instance, referred in passing to Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979) as a play on alternative family arrangements, which developed much further the analysis of the performance of gender mapped out in Gems's *Queen Christina*. Like Wertenbaker's *A Break of Day*, Churchill's *Mad Forest* (1990) was another attempt at 'othering' Eastern Europe and at situating it in a binary opposition to the West, the playwrights' location. Mother-daughter relationships were further explored in Catherine Hayes's naturalistic middle-class three-handers *Skirmishes* (1981) and *Not Waving* (1982), Louise Page's bourgeois feminist-inspired work, *Salonika* (1982) and *Real Estate* (1984), as well as in Winsome Pinnock's investigation of family, home and exile in a post-colonial context in *Leave Taking* (1988). On the other hand, *Lear's Daughters* (1987), jointly scripted by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group, was a play on father-daughter relationships seen from a multiplicity of female perspectives, not only the daughters', but also that of a female company re-appropriating a

canonical male-authored text. (This type of intertextual revisionism has been constantly signalled in this thesis, through the more or less overt citations from Ibsen, Chekhov, Brecht by Gems, Churchill and Wertenbaker.) Equally, *Lear's Daughters* scrutinised the inability to bear sons (cf. the opening of Gems's *Queen Christina*) and the renunciation of biological mothering for the sake of surrogacy (via the nurse). Jane Wolton's *Motherlove* (1987) also confronted biological and surrogate mothering, as well as infertility and ageing, in a triangle of mutual frustrations and jealousies, ultimately locating agency and desire as major criteria for successful parenting. Exploring obsessive maternal desire, Ayshe Raif's *Caving In* (1989), on the other hand, moved on to investigate the ways in which personal commitment and longing could be undermined and eventually eliminated by the phenomenon of ageing and by the revelation of so-far-unacknowledged physiological impediments.

The preoccupation with mothering and motherhood has constituted a cornerstone of contemporary Irish women's drama as well, where the traditional imagery of Mother Ireland gave the subject a particular spiritual, allegorical and political meaning which was absent in mainland UK. A broad range of plays could be referenced as illustrative of this claim, out of which, however, I shall indicate only a few representative cases. Christina Reid's oeuvre has featured both interactions between mothers, daughters and their extended families and their respective religious and class allegiances (mainly Protestant and working-class). Dramatic tension is generally rooted in conflicts between generations that often highlight the political and social transformations that have taken place over the decades. Reid often locates a younger generation of women to point out the striking similarities between Protestant and Catholic ideology in terms of women's status in society and to question these ascribed social roles.² As opposed to these women who refuse patriarchal ideology,

Reid also includes older women who not only acknowledge but actively appropriate the terms of their oppression, perpetuating sexual colonisation. (Cf. Sarah in *Tea in a China Cup* and Vi in *The Belle of the Belfast City*). Beyond sexual complicity, this latter category can also be seen as complicit politically and morally, in that they support the status quo by producing and nurturing further offspring to continue the armed conflicts. Reid, however, also presents women as a source of vitality and creativity, as the agents of genuine communication, humour and caring (for instance, Beth and Theresa in *Tea in a China Cup*, Dolly and Belle in *The Belle of the Belfast City*). These are the figures that are also the most transgressive, able to negotiate the confining boundaries of religious, national and class categorisation and to argue for the viability of human interaction as unrelated to the politics of location.

Anne Devlin's *After Easter* (1994) also investigated interpersonal relationships in a female lineage, focusing on a reunion after a long period of absence.³ As for Reid, for Devlin too the family is emblematic of the nation, and any revisiting of family ties irrevocably triggers a re-examination of national and religious identity. Devlin juxtaposes self-imposed exile and longing for home from the perspective of Greta, a thirty-something woman who abandoned her roots in Ireland in order to marry an Englishman, settle in Oxford and raise her children in the Protestant faith. Hospitalised as a result of post-natal depression, however, Greta suddenly finds herself unable to negotiate the schizophrenic split between her contradictory identities and desires, unequivocally yielding to the call of her past. Captured by a vision of Catholic symbolism, she first reunites with her sisters before returning to Ireland to confront her ghosts, embodied yet again by a syncretism between family, religion and nation: a cousin turned prioress of a convent, her ageing

parents and her brother, caught up in a direct confrontation with British colonial power.

Replicating Greta's visitation by the ghosts of her past, the thirtyish protagonist of Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* (1996) is haunted by her spectral twin brother, dead for fifteen years.⁴ For Portia, the incestuous bond with her brother constituted the ultimate encounter and no other subsequent relationship has managed to measure up to it. Driven by a powerful death instinct ever since the drowning of her brother, every relationship she experienced represents nothing but a deferral of their imminent re-connection. Aware of the fact that this bond was a direct re-enactment of their parents' incestuous relationship, Portia is unable to find solace in family either. This is the reason for her inability to maintain an adequate marital relationship and to experience maternal fulfilment.⁵

Sarah Kane's 1996 *Phaedra's Love*,⁶ another radical reworking of earlier canonical texts, not only altered the focus between the protagonists taken over from Euripides, Seneca and Racine, but also featured a daughter in lieu of the familiar son and the nurse. Kane entirely transformed the essence of human relationships experienced by her characters; and the intricate mother-daughter bond between Phaedra and her street-wise daughter Strophe is reminiscent of Helen's and Jo's double-act in *A Taste of Honey*. Kane confronted a multiplicity of - biological and surrogate - maternal, paternal and filial relationships, alongside a range of sexual and erotic impulses and experiences, examining the potential compatibility between any of these combinations. She also scrutinised the issue of self-imposed guilt as the ultimate moral gesture that had survived into the late twentieth century, following the collapse of grand narratives and messianic utopias.

As opposed to Kane's intimate studio play, the English Touring Company's 1998 double bill *A Second Chance at Happiness* - uniting Marty Cruickshank's *A Difficult Age* and Judith Johnson's *Shellfish*⁷ - was intended for presentation on main stages, locating women's playwriting at the centre of public attention at a time when post-feminist young men's plays had become the fashion. Slightly reminiscent of Wertenbaker's *A Break of Day*, Cruickshank's Chekhovian drama dealt with a delicate mother-daughter relationship within the context of complicated family bonds. Johnson's comedy recalled working-class realism and explored the issue of ageing alongside the desire for mothering later in life, and for having a say in the management of one's existential choices. Although neither production received critical acclaim, their importance in offering fresh perspectives on mothering and in extending the boundaries of women's work in terms of form, content and presentation deserved more credit.

Instead of literary a inspiration, Shelagh Stephenson's 1998 *An Experiment with an Air Pump* was prompted by a painting by Joseph Wright of Derby.⁸ Stephenson juxtaposed two strands, set two centuries apart, both concerned with scientific (medical) experiments. But while the eighteenth century strand centres on the female body as site of deviance and spectacle, the twentieth century one investigates cloning and genetic engineering as new forms of human reproduction. The two strands are related by their exploration of the boundaries of the 'natural', whilst also investigating the moral responsibility of those in a position to transgress such boundaries. Ultimately, however, the present is irredeemably haunted by the past, not only symbolically - via inner dilemmas and clashing arguments - but more literally and powerfully by the spectral victims of former abuse by the medical profession.

I also wish to stress that the preoccupation with mothering in the 1990s came to permeate all the media, including not only play and performance texts, but also the adaptation of non-dramatic works and new scripts for the stage, radio or film. Published as a collection of poems and subsequently turned into a radio play, Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers* (1991) was written for three voices - a daughter, an adoptive mother and a birth mother - whose identities, however, despite the different of typefaces in the printed text, are never entirely distinct.⁹ Kay's deeply autobiographical work narrates a black girl's adoption by a white Scottish couple; however, unlike many other works based on biography, it conveys with equal intensity the three characters' different points of view. As a result, Kay's work is an outstanding contribution - unsentimental yet tender, generous yet painful - at the intersection of several disciplines: from poetry to theatre, from feminism to race relations.

Equally, the trajectory of Sharman MacDonald's *The Winter Guest* involved a succession of versions: from the 1995 play-text to the immediately following theatre performance and to the 1998 film adaptation.¹⁰ All three generated positive audience response, but it was the film version that attracted most attention, mainly due to the casting of Phyllida Law and Emma Thompson in the main roles. Whilst the play anatomises the encounter between three generations (grandmother, mother and son), the film not only appropriated this preoccupation but doubled it with the real-life mother-daughter bond of the two leading actresses, establishing a poignant intersection between fact and fiction.

Written by actress and novelist Meera Syal and directed by Gurinder Chadha, *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) is a light-hearted plea for broadening the British interpretation of partnerships and parenting in the context of the Asian extended

family system.¹¹ Following a group of women of different ages and social statuses on a day trip to Blackpool, the film juxtaposed two couples in crisis: both confronted by the negotiation of parenthood. One case is a collapsing marriage in which the spouses are battling for the custody of their young son; the other consists of an Asian teenager expecting her black boyfriend's child whilst her family urges her to enrol in higher education. Utilising situation comedy, the film reveals all its secrets as soon as possible to as many ears as possible, in order to oppose traditional expectations to the changing norms of contemporary society. Apart from the immediate clashes, however, Syal and Chadha also suggested an emerging potential for negotiation embracing both generations. But while the married couple fails to arrive at a mutually acceptable compromise, hope and community support is implicitly mapped out for the inter-racial partnership.

Alongside plays that I did not address as a result of editorial decisions, my imaginary analysis continues with works due to emerge from now onwards. I believe that British women's theatre will maintain its diversity in terms of genre and subject matter, and that it will carry on investigating women's position with regard to maternity and the family. I also hope that the recently announced massive funding to the world of the arts will enhance the visibility of women's theatre making, in terms of both writing and staging new work. As Charlotte Keatley argued, in the twentieth century women's lives 'changed dramatically between four generations' [more than men's], a change that has continued into this century too. 'The way women bring up children sets the values for the next generation', according to Keatley, for whom dramatising 'women's and men's lives right now' constitutes a 'responsibility', whilst it also offers a 'a capsule about society at a [given] time'.¹² Though it is extremely difficult to make sense of the events that occurred at the end of the

twentieth century - following 'the failure of all political ideals' - in Timberlake Wertenbaker's words, it is nevertheless crucial to make an effort, as 'any contribution that can be made *is* a good one'.¹³

What precise manifestations mothering and parenting will take in the future is, of course, unknown. As long as a legislation as recent as 1989 (The Children Act)¹⁴ and 1996 (The Family Law Act)¹⁵ reinforce the primacy of the nuclear family, alternative arrangements must mainly be located at the margins.¹⁶ The extent to which these alternative forms of organisation will succeed in contesting the current status quo will decide whether or not a genuine large-scale transformation will take place. As Teresa de Lauretis argued, 'neither race nor gender nor homosexual difference alone can constitute individual identity';¹⁷ thus it cannot form the exclusive foundation for potential social transformations. De Lauretis called attention to Audre Lorde's concept of a 'house of difference' - as opposed to 'the security of any one particular difference'¹⁸ - in an attempt to transcend, not to deny, gender, sex or race. Thus neither the negation of difference nor the overemphasis of any particular difference would prevail; Lorde's 'house of difference' represents a 'conception of community not pluralistic, but at once global and local-global in its inclusive macro-political strategies, and local in its specific, micro-political strategies'.¹⁹

At the moment, another challenge for the majority of women is the negotiation between the tendency for individualism that became consolidated throughout the eighties and nineties and the innate human impulse for belonging to organised structures. Following the mass appeal of feminism in the seventies and the emergence of simultaneous feminist positions in the late seventies and eighties, by

the nineties the entire concept and practice of women's association has undergone major transformations. Unlike earlier attempts at the erasure of hierarchies in women's organisation, feminists in the nineties acknowledged the rigidity of categories such as race and sexuality, and embraced multiplicity as a route towards alternative patterns of institutionalisation. Thus, rather than providing a universal framework to suit all women, there emerged a multitude of different, non-hierarchical positions to reflect everyone's specific background and politics. As a result of this ideological atomisation, however, the very term 'feminism' has lost its specificity, needing constant re-definition before being utilised. My thesis has documented precisely this reservation with regard to the 'feminist' label, directly involving most of the playwrights discussed. The fact that currently only a small segment of British women identify themselves as feminists and is affiliated to women's groups, however, indicates more than the problematisation of the label at a personal level. As Wertenbaker's characters point out, feminism at the turn of the third millennium 'is a peace treaty, not a love feast',²⁰ urging the necessity for the complex network of feminist positions to re-connect to one another, in order for feminism to yet again re-invent itself.

¹ Charlotte Bunch, quoted in Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (The Hague, Netherlands: Institute of Social Studies, 1982), p. iv.

² ROSE: 'Their right-wing Protestant church is in total agreement with their right-wing Catholic Church on issues like divorce and abortion, on a woman's right to be anything other than a mother or a daughter or a sister or a wife.' (*The Belle of the Belfast City*, p. 221.) JANET: 'There are no women in Ireland. Only mothers, sisters and wives.' (Ibid., p. 210.) Cf. Christina Reid, *Plays: One* - including *Tea in a China Cup* (1983/1987), *Joyriders*, *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989), *Clowns* (London, Methuen, 1997).

³ Anne Devlin, *After Easter* (London: Faber, 1994).

⁴ Despite being labelled as political playwrights, Reid and Devlin write primarily in Standard English. Marina Carr, on the other hand, although less overtly political in her subject matter, chose to script *Portia Coughlan* in Irish dialect.

⁵ PORTIA: 'Ah never wanted sons nor daughters an' ah never pertended otherwise ta ya [...]. Buh ya though' ya chould woo me inta motherhood. Well ud hasn't worched ouh has ud. Y'ave yar three sons now so ya behher mine thim acause ah chan't love thim Raphael, ah'm jus' noh able.' Cf. Marina Carr, *Portia Coughlan* (London: Faber, 1996), pp. 28-29.

⁶ Sarah Kane, *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* (London: Methuen Drama, 1996).

⁷ Marty Cruickshank, *A Difficult Age*; Judith Johnson, *Shellfish* - directed by Steven Unwin (English Touring Company, 1998).

⁸ Shelagh Stephenson, *An Experiment with an Air Pump* (London: Methuen, 1998); Joseph Wright of Derby, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (London: The National Gallery).

⁹ Jackie Kay, *The Adoption Papers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991).

¹⁰ Sharman MacDonald, *The Winter Guest* (London: Faber, 1995); *The Winter Guest*, film version, directed by Alan Rickman (1998).

¹¹ *Bhaji on the Beach*, written by Meera Syal, directed by Gurinder Chadha (UHBI Films and Channel Four, Film on Four, 1993).

¹² Keatley interviewed by Komporály (17 November 1999).

¹³ Wertenbaker interviewed by Komporály (21 June 1999).

¹⁴ The Act sustains the presumption that father-child contacts are always in the child's best interest, even in cases of proven domestic violence. Cf. the case of two-year old Chelsea Brown, consistently abused and eventually shaken to death by her father in December 1999. Despite the father's previous criminal record and regular inspections of the family home, social workers considered it adequate to leave Chelsea with her biological parents rather than moving her to foster care. (The father was eventually sentenced by Nottingham Crown Court on 6 March, 2001.) Cf. Paul Kelso, '27 Visits by Social Worker Failed to Save Child', *The Guardian* (7 March 2001).

¹⁵ For those having children and considering divorce a mandatory period of 'reflection and consideration', lasting up to two years, has been introduced.

¹⁶ Cf. the mainly Italian-centred practice to make post-menopausal women fertile or the currently raging debate on Internet-mediated adoptions (see especially the battle between a British and an American couple, who have adopted the same twin babies).

¹⁷ Teresa de Lauretis, 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40. no. 2. (1988), p. 164.

¹⁸ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (London: Pandora Press, 1996 - initial publication, 1982), p. 197. Although the concept of 'the house of difference' was launched in Lorde's autobiography from the perspective of a black lesbian woman - and was further utilised in a similar context by Mary F. Brewer and in a lesbian one by de Lauretis - I consider its symbolism relevant for white and/or heterosexual women as well, if prepared to acknowledge and resist the operation of intra-gender hierarchies within women. See Brewer, *Race, Sex and Gender in Contemporary Women's Theatre: The Construction of "Woman"* (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999) p. 163.

¹⁹ de Lauretis, p. 164.

²⁰ TESS: 'What's feminism for if we hate each other?' NINA: 'It's a peace treaty, not a love feast'. Cf. Timberlake Wertenbaker, *The Break of Day* (Faber, 1995), p. 27.

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